

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH 2, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. PERCY OSMOND.

"WE shall not be able to leave Paris for five or six weeks." So wrote Edith West to Lionel Dering at Park Newton.

Mrs. Garside's sister—her sister by marriage only—was dead. The house, plate, and furniture were to be sold, and Mrs. Garside had much to do. Edith, as a matter of course, must stay with her aunt. Lionel, if he wanted to see his promised wife, must go to Paris : and to Paris he decided that he would go.

The same post which brought him this letter from Edith brought him another from India, written by his uncle, General St. George. The old soldier's letter ran as under :

"MY DEAR NEPHEW,—Allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune, the news of which followed close upon the intimation of my poor brother's death. I can safely say that there is no one in whose hands I would sooner see the family estates than yours. I contracted a very warm affection for you during my last visit to England, and that feeling has not diminished with time. But you must change your name, my dear boy. I know that you are a St. George at heart, and you must be one in name also. However, that is one of the things that we can discuss fully when I see you again. Please Heaven that will be before either you or I are many months older.

"Yes, my dear nephew, it is even so. The old horse is nearly worn out at last. People begin to whisper that he is no longer equal to his work ; and although the sound of the trumpet and the clash of arms have still their old charm for his ears, the day must shortly come when he will

hear them for the last time. In brief, Lionel, putting aside what other people may think, I feel myself that I am getting creaky and out of repair, and a great longing has come over me to spend the few remaining days that may be left me somewhere near that dear old homestead where I first drew breath.

"I will write you full particulars in a week or two. Your brother Richard is in good health, and is prospering. I had a letter from him only a few days ago. As things have turned out, it is perhaps quite as well that he came out to India instead of you.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"LIONEL ST. GEORGE."

"He shall live with us at Park Newton," said Lionel to himself as he folded up the letter. "It will be like finding a second father to have dear old Uncle Lionel come and share our home."

A few days later Lionel received a note from Tom Bristow. It was addressed to Gatehouse Farm, and had been sent from thence to Park Newton, Tom not having heard of Lionel's change of fortune. It was dated from Egypt, and was written with Tom's usual brevity. "Health much improved. Hope to be back in England in about three months from now. Shall take early opportunity of looking you up. The dear old days at the farm are not forgotten." That was nearly all.

"He will be here in time for the wedding," said Lionel as he read the note. "I should like Tom Bristow to be my best man on that important occasion."

Nearly a fortnight passed away before Lionel Dering was able to leave the house. The wound on his head was a very severe one, and for the first two days and nights he lay in bed, to all outward seeming more dead than alive. As soon as he was in a condition to do so he sent for the Duxley superintendent of police, and told him confidentially all that he knew of the affair. Lionel was strongly averse to all unnecessary publicity, and was especially desirous that no mention of the case should be made in the local newspapers. Had he been asked to state his reasons for wishing to keep the matter so private, he would perhaps have found it difficult to do so. Nevertheless, the feeling to act thus was strong upon him.

It was proved, on investigation, that the intruder, whoever he might be, had obtained access to the house through one of the library windows. One of the panes had been cut with a diamond, and the window then unfastened. Next came the discovery of a secret passage from the library to the late Mr. St. George's bedroom. Those among the servants who had been at Park Newton under the old régime denied all knowledge of the existence of any such passage, and their statements might well be true.

The passage in question was one of a kind by no means uncommon in houses built a couple of centuries ago. It was simply a very narrow

staircase, built in the thickness of the wall, and leading from the ground floor to the floor above. The entrance to it was behind a sliding panel in the bedroom; but both exit and entrance were so carefully hidden that a person might pass his whole life at Park Newton without ever suspecting the existence of such a place. One of Lionel's first acts, after a thorough exploration of the passage had been made, was to send for the bricklayers and have both entrance and exit walled up.

But the little closet or cupboard in the bedroom had still to be considered. It was nothing more than a small square opening in the wall; and, like the staircase, it was hidden behind the panelling, and secured still further by means of a secret spring. It was evident that the late Mr. St. George had known the secret of the cupboard, and had used the place as a safe depository for money and other valuables. It was equally certain that this latter fact must have been well known to Lionel's assailant; and there could be no doubt that the object of the midnight raid had been to rifle the cupboard of its contents. Some testimony as to the quality of those contents had been unavoidably left behind in the hurry of flight. Three or four small diamonds, and a couple of sovereigns of recent coinage, were found scattered on the floor: but as to the further value of the property stolen there were no means of judging.

Lionel had no reason for suspecting any of the people immediately about him, nor did such a thought ever find a lodging in his mind. The more he considered the matter, the more certain he felt that the man of whom he had caught a glimpse in the shrubbery was really the thief. But even granting such to be the case, the mystery was no nearer solution than before. Whoever the man might be, he had got clear away without leaving the slightest memento behind him by which he might be traced.

Lionel's first visit, when he was able to get out of doors again, was to a little cottage on the outskirts of Duxley, where lived an old man, Joseph Nixon by name, who had been body-servant to the late Mr. St. George, and to his father before him. Nixon was now living on a pension granted him by the family; and it seemed to Lionel that he would be more likely than anyone else to have a knowledge of the hidden staircase, and the cupboard in the bedroom wall. Lionel found the old man infirm in body but clear in mind. Yes, he said, in answer to Lionel's inquiries, he knew all about the staircase in the wall, and the little closet behind the panelling in his old master's bedroom. Mr. St. George, who was somewhat peculiar in his ways, was in the habit of keeping a considerable amount of ready money in the house, and used the cupboard as a secure place of deposit known to himself and Nixon alone.

"But was there nothing besides money ever kept there?" asked Lionel.

"Yes, sir; there was a diamond necklace, and some other things as well," answered Nixon.

"It was rather a strange place in which to keep a diamond necklace, was it not?"

"Well, sir, this is how it was. When Mr. Arthur St. George was a young man, he was engaged to be married to a handsome young lady. The wedding day was fixed, and everything ready, when he made her a present of a diamond necklace. She wore it once only—at a grand ball to which he took her. Next day she was taken ill; a week later she was dead. Her friends sent back the necklace, and my master seemed as if he could never bear to part from it after that time. Many and many a time I've known him to sleep with it under his pillow."

Here was a page of romance out of his uncle's life that was quite fresh to Lionel.

"He was one o' the old-fashioned sort of lovers, was Mr. St. George," added Nixon. "He didn't know what it was to change."

"And are you certain that my uncle and yourself were the only two people who knew of the existence of the staircase and the cupboard? Try to remember. Think carefully before you answer."

"It's not in my knowledge," answered the old man, slowly, "that anybody knew about either of them places but my master and myself. Unless, maybe —"

"Yes—unless what?"

"Unless Mr. Kester St. George happened to know about them."

"And do you really think that my cousin Kester does know that there are two such places in existence?" asked Lionel after a pause.

"Now I come to think of it, sir, he does know about the cupboard. Going suddenly into the bedroom one day, without knowing that he was there, I found him standing by the cupboard, with the door open, and the diamond necklace in his hand. It was not my place to say anything, and it seemed no more than likely, at that time, that some day the necklace would be his own property. But, as regards the staircase, sir, I don't know as Mr. Kester was ever told about that."

There was nothing more to be learned, so Lionel took a kindly leave of the old man, who seemed as if he could not sufficiently express his delight at not having been forgotten by "the new master."

Lionel neither could nor would believe that Kester had had any hand in the midnight robbery. Nevertheless, he sent word next day to the chief constable of Duxley not to proceed any further with his investigation of the affair. In his letters to Edith he had been careful not to mention the matter in any way. It would only have frightened her, and could have done no possible good.

As soon as he was thoroughly recovered he set out for Paris. He had not seen Edith for several weeks, and longer separation was unendurable.

One morning there came a letter to Edith, in which Lionel stated that he should be in Paris twelve hours after the receipt of it.

What a day of joyful expectation was that! Edith could neither read, nor work, nor even sit quietly and do nothing. All she could do was to wander absently from room to room, touching a few notes on the piano now and again, or gaze dreamily out of the windows, or feed the noisy troop of sparrows that assembled daily on the window-sill for their accustomed bounty. She sent out for a Railway Guide that she might be enabled to follow Lionel step by step on his journey. "Now he is at Dover," she said to herself. A little while later, "Now the steamer is nearly at Calais." Later still, "Now he has left Calais. Half his journey is over. In six more hours he will be here."

"Come and have some tea, child," said Mrs. Garside. "I declare you look quite worn and anxious. Mr. Dering will think I've been working you to death."

Mrs. Garside was very glad on her own account that Lionel was coming. The forms and processes of French law in connection with the property left her by her sister troubled her exceedingly. She knew that she could count on Lionel's good-natured assistance in extricating her from sundry perplexities into which she had fallen.

How slowly the hours went by; as hours, when they are watched, always seem to do! Mrs. Garside began to prophesy. "Perhaps the train will be delayed," she said. "Perhaps he will think it too late to call. Perhaps we shall not see him till midday to-morrow." To all which Edith could only respond with a doleful "Perhaps."

"But for all that," said Mrs. Garside, "we will have dinner ready for him to the minute. Men are never good-tempered when they are hungry. Always bear that little fact in mind, Edith, when you get married."

So a choice little repast was prepared; and Edith went out and bought some flowers with which to decorate the table; then the candles were lighted; and after that they could only sit and wait.

By-and-by, a cab came rattling into the courtyard. Then there came the sound of welcome footsteps on the stairs, and next moment Lionel was with them.

What two happy hours were those before the time came for them to bid each other good-night! But, then, what a little suffices to make us happy when we are in love! Kind-hearted Mrs. Garside was happy in the happiness of Edith, and in the freshness and change which Lionel's welcome arrival brought with it. Edith and Lionel asked nothing more, for the time being, than to be able to see each other, and speak to each other, and to spell out that silent language of the eyes which has often a meaning far more deep and heartfelt than any words can convey.

In Paris, that year, the spring seemed to come earlier than usual. Already the Bois was beginning to clothe itself in a mantle of tenderest green. The daylight hours were warm and bright. Hardly a cloud was

to be seen in the sky. All the gay world of Paris was on the *qui vive*. It was a splendid moving panorama, framed with flowers and softest buds just bursting into leaf. To the fancies of Edith and Lionel it almost seemed as if all this glamour and brightness had been devised by some kind fairy godmother for their especial behoof, simply because they were under love's sweet witchery, and that it would all vanish like a dream the moment they two should have quitted the scene. They spent hours in the Louvre looking at the pictures. They spent more hours on the pleasant Boulevards, jostled by troops of pleasure seekers. But it is more than probable that, as sightseers, they saw very little indeed. They moved like dreamers in the midst of a crowd, like denizens of a more etherealized world, who breathed, as of right, a finer atmosphere, and in whose veins flowed the only true elixir of life. It was a season of happiness, pure and unalloyed. They saw nothing—not even in their dreams had they any prevision—of the huge black cloud whose edge already touched the horizon; whose sable folds would soon shut out the sunshine and the flowers; but whose thunders would smite in vain the strong pure rock of their mutual love.

By the end of a fortnight, thanks to the assistance given by Lionel, Mrs. Garside's legal difficulties were at an end. After a few last lingering days in Lutetia the Beautiful, they went back to London together. Lionel saw the two ladies safely housed in Roehampton Terrace, and then bade them farewell for a little while. The marriage was to take place in June, and there was much to be done before that time.

Having some purchases to make, Lionel stopped in London for a few hours, after leaving Edith, before continuing his journey home. He had kept telling himself, as he came along in the train, that he must not fail to call on Kester before going back to Park Newton. He wanted his cousin to fix a date for his promised visit. But when London was reached, and his business done, he still felt unaccountably reluctant to pay the call. He shrank from making any inquiry of himself as to the origin of this strange reluctance, but its existence he could not dispute. Was it possible that some half-formed and unacknowledged doubt was at work in his mind as to whether the man who had so brutally struck him down was any other than Kester St. George? If so, it was a doubt that never clothed itself with words even to himself. But, be that as it may, four o'clock was reached; his train started at five, and Great Carington Street was still as far away as ever.

His irresolution was brought to a sudden end at last. He was gazing absently into Colnaghi's window, when a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder, and his cousin's musical voice fell on his ear.

"What! in town again, old fellow? You might have let one know that you were coming."

All Lionel's half-shaped doubts vanished in a moment under the influence of his cousin's genial smile and hearty grasp of the hand. As

he stood there his conscience pricked him that he should have wronged Kester for a moment even in thought.

"I have only just got back from Paris," he said. "I am glad to have met you, because I want you to fix a date for your promised visit to Park Newton."

Kester was not alone. His arm was linked in that of another man. "Before fixing anything," he said, "I must introduce to you my particular friend, Mr. Percy Osmond.—Osmond, my cousin, Li Dering, of whom you have frequently heard me speak."

The two men bowed.

"Is it possible," asked Lionel, "that you are a brother of the Mr. Kenneth Osmond whom I met when in America?"

"Kenneth Osmond and I are certainly brothers," answered the other.

"Then I am very pleased to make your acquaintance. Your brother and I travelled together for six months through some of the wildest parts of North America. I never met with a man in my life whom I esteemed more or liked better."

"Look here," said Kester. "We can't stand talking in the street for ever. My club's not three minutes away. Let us go there and chat over a bottle of their dry champagne."

Mr. Percy Osmond was about eight-and-twenty years old. He was of medium height and slender build, and of a somewhat effeminate appearance. He had good features, and had rather fine black eyes, of which he was particularly proud. But there was a shiftiness about them, a restlessly suspicious look, as though the man at one time had been haunted by some terrible fear, and had never been able to forget it.

His face was closely shaven, except for a thin, silky, black moustache, which he wore with long waxed ends. He was foppishly dressed in the latest fashion, and displayed a profusion of jewellery. But there was something about him so arrogant and self-opinionated, something so coldly contemptuous of other men's feelings and opinions whenever they chanced to clash with his own, that Lionel had not been ten minutes in his company before he said to himself that Mr. Percy Osmond was very different from Mr. Percy Osmond's brother, and could never be included by him among the few men he numbered as his friends.

"So you want to pin me down to a date, do you?" said Kester as they sat down in the smoking-room at the club.

"I should certainly like to fix you, now that I am here," answered Lionel.

"How would this day fortnight suit you?"

"No time could suit me better. And if Mr. Osmond will honour me by coming down to Park Newton at the same time, I need hardly say how pleased I shall be to see him there."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said Osmond. "Glad to run down to your place, especially as St. George is going. Am thinking of buying a

quiet little country roost myself. Town life is awfully wearing, you know."

Kester laughed aloud. "Osmond would commit suicide before he had been in the country a month," he said. "He is one of those unhappy mortals who cannot live away from bricks and mortar. The shady side of Pall Mall is dearer to him than all the country lanes and hayfields in the world."

"You do me an injustice—really," said Osmond. "Some of my tastes are quite idyllic. No one, for instance, could be fonder of clotted cream than I am. I never shoot, myself—haven't muscle enough for it, you know—yet I have a weakness for grouse pie that almost verges on the sublime."

"Or the ridiculous," interposed Kester.

"By-the-by, I hope you are not without a billiard-table at your place," said Osmond, with that affected little cough which was peculiar to him.

"We have a table on which you shall play all day long if you choose," returned Lionel.

"Then I'll come. Country air and billiards — charming combination! Yes, you may expect to see me at the same time that you see St. George."

He made a memorandum of the date in his tablets; and after a little further talk, he shook hands with Lionel and went, leaving the two cousins together.

Kester looked after him with a sneer. "There goes another gilded fool," he said.

"I thought you introduced him to me as your particular friend," said Lionel.

"I called him my particular friend because he is rich. I can't afford to call any poor man my friend."

"My reason for inviting him to Park Newton was partly because I thought it would please you to have him there at the same time as yourself, and partly out of compliment to his brother, whom I respect and like exceedingly."

"Don't mistake me. I am glad you have asked him down to the old place. As I said before, he is rich, and some day or other he may be useful to me. All the same, he's an awful screw, and thinks as much of one sovereign as I do of five."

"How long have you known him?" asked Lionel.

"For a dozen years at the least. When he was twenty-one he came in for a fortune of twelve thousand pounds. This he contrived to get through very comfortably in the course of a couple of seasons. Then came the climax. For two years longer he managed to pick up a precarious crust among the different friends and acquaintances whom he had made during his more prosperous days. Then, when everybody

had become thoroughly tired of him, he crossed the Atlantic. For the next four years he was lost sight of utterly. When heard of again, he had sunk to the position of marker in a billiard-saloon at New Orleans. After that, he was heard of in several places, but always in dreadfully low water. Then came the story of a murder in which he was said to be somehow mixed up, but nobody on this side seemed ever to get at the truth about it; and the next thing we heard about him was something altogether different. An old maiden aunt had died and had left the scapegrace eighty thousand pounds. Such as you saw him to-day, he turned up in London three months ago. Bitter experience has taught him the value of money. Still he has his weaknesses. What those weaknesses are it is my business just now to find out."

CHAPTER X.

MASTER AND MAN.

"SHALL I shut the window, sir? The evening is rather cold."

It was Pierre Janvard, the body-servant of Mr. Kester St. George, who spoke. The place was a room at Park Newton, for Kester had come there on his promised visit. The same suite of rooms had been allotted to him that had been his during his uncle's lifetime—the same furniture was still in them: everything seemed unchanged. "Do you hear the bells, sir?" continued Pierre. "The village ringers are having their Wednesday evening practice. They always used to practise on Wednesday evenings, sir, if you remember. It seems only like yesterday since you left Park Newton."

To all this Mr. St. George vouchsafed no reply. He was dressing for dinner, a process to which he always attached much importance, and was just at that moment engaged with the knot of his white tie. He was evidently in anything but an amiable mood—a fact of which Pierre was perfectly aware, but did not seem to mind in the least.

"Do you remember, sir, talking to me one evening when you were dressing for dinner, just as it might be now, of what you would do, sir, and what alterations you would make, when Park Newton was all your own? You would build a new wing, and a new entrance-hall, and cut a fresh carriage-drive through the Park. And then the stables were to be rebuilt, and the gardens altered and improved, and ——"

"Pierre, you are a fool," said Mr. St. George, with emphasis.

The ghost of a smile flickered across the valet's staid features, but he did not answer.

Mr. St. George looked at his watch. It still wanted half an hour to dinner-time. He felt in no humour for seeing either Osmond or his cousin till they should all meet at table. He would stroll as far as the little summer-house on the Knoll, and look once more on a scene that he remembered so well. He put on a light overcoat and a soft hat, and,

going leisurely downstairs, he went slowly through the picture-gallery and the conservatory, and let himself out by a side door into the grounds at the back of the house. Every step that he took was haunted for him with memories of the past. His heart was full of bitterness and resentment that Fate, as he called it, should have played with him at such a terrible game of cross purposes, and have ended by winning everything from him. "If I had never been brought up to look upon it as sure to be one day my own," he said, "I could have borne to see it another man's without regret. Pierre is right; I did dream and plan and say to myself that I would do this thing and that thing when the time came for me to be master here. And now I, Kester St. George, am nothing better than a pauper and a blackleg, and am here on sufferance—an invited guest under the very roof that ought in justice to be mine!"

He took the winding path through the plantation that led to the summit of the Knoll. The summer-house was unlocked as usual. He went in and sat down. The scene before him and around him was very pleasant to look upon, lighted up, as it was just then, by the fading splendours of an April sunset. The Hall itself, clasped tenderly round with shrubberies of softest green, lay close at his feet. Far and wide on either side stretched the Park, with its clumps of noble old trees that had seen generation after generation of the St. Georges come and go like creatures of a day, and still flourished unchanged. Away in the distance could be seen Highworth and other prosperous farms, all part and parcel of the Park Newton estate.

"All this belongs of right to me," muttered Kester to himself, as his eyes took in the whole pleasant picture; "and it would have been mine but for——"

He did not finish the sentence even to himself, but the gloom on his face deepened, and for a few moments the unhappy man sat with drooping head, seeing nothing but some terrible picture which his own words had conjured up.

He roused himself from his reverie with a sigh. The sun was nearly lost to view. Eastward the glooms of evening were beginning to enfold the landscape in their dusky wings. Blue curls of smoke wound slowly upward from the twisted chimneys of the Hall. A few belated rooks came flying over the Knoll on their way to their nests in the wood. The picture was redolent of homelike beauty and repose. "Only one life stands between me and all this," he muttered, as his eyes drank in the scene greedily. "Only one life. If Lionel Dering were to die to-night, I should be master to-morrow of all that I see before me."

He rose and left the summer-house. He could hear the clanging of the dinner-bell. It was time to go.

"Only one life. And what is the value of any one particular life among the thousands that are born and die every day? Who would

miss him—who would regret him? No one. He is an isolated link in the great chain of humanity. . . He might die to-night, or to-morrow, or next day. Stranger things than that have happened before now.”

He pulled his hat over his brows and went slowly down the pathway, and was presently lost to view among the gloomy depths of the plantation.

Left alone, Pierre Janvard settled himself comfortably in an easy chair to enjoy the perusal of one of Mr. St. George's yellow-backed French novels. He was a thin, staid-looking man of fifty, decidedly more English than French in appearance. He was partially bald, and was closely shaven, except for two small whiskers of the kind known as “mutton chop.” What hair he had was thickly sprinkled with gray, and was carefully trained and attended to. He had a good forehead, a rather large aquiline nose, and thin, firmly-cut lips. In his suit of well brushed black, and his spotless white tie, he looked the model of a respectable and thoroughly trustworthy servant. He looked more than that. Had he been set down at a public dinner among a miscellaneous assemblage of guests, a stranger would probably have picked him out as a banker or a rich merchant, or might even have asked, and have been pardoned for asking, whether he were not some celebrated lawyer, or member of the Lower House. He spoke English with a French accent as a matter of course, but he could express himself as readily in one language as the other. He had a particularly quiet, noiseless way of going about his duties that many people might have liked, but which would have been intolerable to others. You never seemed to know that he was near you till you found him at your elbow.

Such as he was—this smug, respectable-looking valet—his antecedents were somewhat peculiar. His grandfather had been one of the sub-executioners of Paris during the terrible days of the Great Revolution. Later on, his father had for many years held the post of public executioner in one of the large towns in the south of France. Pierre himself had been intended for the same profession, and had, when a youth, assisted his father on more than one occasion in the performance of his ghastly duties. But the death of Janvard père brought a change of prospects. The widow was persuaded to come over to England and invest the family savings in the purchase of a small blanchisserie at the West End of London; and from that date Pierre's connection with his native country was a broken one.

Kester St. George's tastes were all luxurious ones. One of the first things he did after he came of age was to look out for a valet. Pierre Janvard was recommended to him by a friend, and he engaged him at once. The Frenchman had served him faithfully and well, had travelled with him, and had lived with him at Park Newton up to the date of Kester's quarrel with his uncle. But when the whole of Kester's income was swept away at one blow, and he was thrown on the world without a

sovereign that he could call his own, then Jamard and he of necessity parted. Their coming together again was quite a matter of accident. It so happened that, a few days after Kester had won heavily on a certain race, he encountered Janvard in the street. The Frenchman touched his hat, and Kester stopped and spoke to him. The result was that Janvard, who was out of a situation at that time, was re-engaged by St. George, whose old, luxurious tastes cropped up the moment he found himself in abundant funds. Those funds could not last for ever, and a season of impecuniosity had again set in; but the bond between master and man had not again been broken.

Janvard stayed on with Mr. St. George. He was thoroughly trustworthy, or so Kester believed; and he probably knew more of his master's secrets—more of certain shady transactions that were never intended to bear the light of day—than any other man living.

Janvard had one relation in England—a sister—with whom he was on terms of close and affectionate intercourse. Both he and his sister were unmarried, and they both intended to remain so. Madame Janvard—she was called Madame out of compliment to her age, which was nearer fifty than forty—kept a small boarding-house for her countrymen in a narrow street no great distance from Leicester Square. She had saved money, had madame. So had her brother. And the secret ambition of the two was to unite their fortunes, and start together as proprietors of a first-class hotel.

Pierre's holidays and leisure time, when he was in town, were always spent with his sister, in whose house one little cockloft of a room was set apart specially for him, and was full of his property. Here he kept a few boxes of choice cigars for his own private smoking, and a varied assortment of French novels and plays, together with sundry articles of bric-à-brac which he had picked up during his travels. But, in addition to these articles, the room contained several remarkable mementos of the Great Revolution, which had come down to Pierre from his grandfather. In one corner hung the veritable pair of shoes worn by Charlotte Corday on the day that she stabbed Marat. In a little glass box on the chimney-piece was a lock of hair shorn from the head of Marie Antoinette after execution. Near it was a handkerchief that had belonged to the Princess de Lamballe. On a bracket opposite the window stood a life-size bust of Marat himself, the hideous head crowned with the bonnet rouge, and inscribed below, *Le Genie de la Revolution*. Near at hand was a working model of the guillotine, made by the redoubtable hands of old Martin Janvard, and close by it a model of one of the tumbrils in which the condemned were conveyed to the Place de la Grève. In this room Pierre and his sister had many pleasant little banquets all to themselves, and many a long chat on matters past, present, and to come. Not having her to talk to to-night, he was going to write to her, which was the next best thing he could do. So when he had yawned through a

couple of chapters of the novel, he took pen and paper, and sat down at Mr. St. George's table, being perfectly aware that he was safe from interruption for another hour at the least. Judging by what Pierre Janvard wrote, there would seem, this evening, to have been a strange similarity in the trains of thought at work in the minds of master and man.

"We are once again back in the old place, *chère Margot*," wrote the Frenchman. "Was it only yesterday, or is it more than a year ago, since we were in these rooms last? Everything seems as it used to be, except that the old master's voice is heard no longer. He lies cold and quiet in the churchyard. Nothing else seems changed, and yet how changed is all! For a new master now reigns at Park Newton, and that master it not Monsieur Kester St. George. Of course, we have known of this all along, but not till we came here did we seem to realize all that it means. One man, and one man only, stands between my master and all this vast property. That man, as you know already, is his own cousin. He is not married, but he may be before long. If he were only to catch a fever and die—if he were only to commit suicide—if he were only to fall into the river and be drowned—ah, my faith! what luck would then be ours.

"And yet, somehow, little one, I feel as if I should hardly like to change places with this Monsieur Dering. I don't know why I feel so, but there the feeling is, and I tell you of it. Life is so strangely uncertain, you know; and it seems to me more uncertain still when you stand so terribly in the light of another man. Perhaps you will say that I am superstitious. So be it. But can any man say where superstition begins and where it ends, even in his own mind? I can't. All I know is this: that if I were Monsieur Dering, the last man in the world whom I would ask to cross my threshold would be Monsieur Kester St. George."

A fortnight had come and gone since the arrival of Kester St. George and Percy Osmond at Park Newton. Another week would bring their visit to an end, and Lionel Dering was fain to confess to himself that he should not be sorry when that time had arrived. This was more particularly the case as regards Osmond, of whose company he had grown heartily tired. There was, indeed, about Osmond, little or nothing that could have any attraction for a man like Lionel Dering. The points of difference between them were too great for any hope to exist that they could ever be bridged over. Friendship between two such men was an impossibility.

With Kester St. George the case was somewhat different. Lionel would gladly have clasped his cousin's hand in friendship, but he had begun to find out that beneath all Kester's geniality, and easy laughing way of dealing with everything that came before him, there existed a nature cold, hard, and cynical, against which the white wings of Friend-

ship or of Love might beat in vain for ever. He was always pleasant, always smiling, always good-tempered : yet it seemed impossible to get near him, or to feel sure that you knew him better at the end of a year than on the first day you met him. Then, too, Lionel was not without an uneasy sense that not only the servants at the Hall, but his own social equals in the neighbourhood, looked upon him, in some measure, as an interloper, and seemed to think that he must, in some inscrutable way, have defrauded his cousin out of his birthright. No wonder Lionel felt that it would be a relief when the visit should have come to an end.

He had taken an opportunity one day, when Kester seemed in a more confidential mood than usual, of again hinting at the pleasure it would give him if his cousin would only accept that three thousand a year out of the estate which it was his grandfather's manifest wish should be Kester's share of the property. But Kester froze the moment the subject was broached, and Lionel saw plainly how utterly useless any further persistence in it would be.

Both Squire Culpepper and Mr. Cope had called at Park Newton as soon as they heard that Kester St. George was down there on a visit, and a day or two later Lionel invited those gentlemen, together with several other old friends of his cousin, to a dinner at the Hall in honour of the occasion. Three or four return dinners had been given by different people, and now the day was come when they were all to go and dine with the Squire at Pincote—Lionel, Kester, and Mr. Percy Osmond.

The afternoon was cold and gloomy, with frequent showers of rain. Luncheon was just over, and Kester St. George, who had been out riding all the morning, was sitting alone before a cozy fire in his dressing-room, keeping the unwelcome company of his own thoughts. In his hands was a cheque which Osmond, who had just left him, had given him in settlement of a long-standing debt at cards.

"The greedy hound!" he muttered to himself. "It was like drawing blood from a stone to get even this paltry strip of paper from him. And yet if this were made out for eight thousand pounds instead of for *eight only*, it would be honoured. Aye, if it were for six times eight thousand pounds : and there would then be a little fortune left. One thing's very certain. I must raise a couple of thousand somewhere before I'm many hours older, or else I shall have to make a bolt of it—have to put salt water between myself and the hounds that are for ever baying at my heels. If Nantucket had only pulled off the Chester Cup, I should have landed three thousand at the very least. Just like my luck that she should fall lame twelve hours before the race. I *must* have two thousand," he went on as he rose and began to pace the room, "or else submit to be outlawed. Osmond could lend it to me and never feel the loss of it. Shall I ask him? As well try to move a rock. He knows that I'm poor already. If he knew that I was a pauper, he'd cut me dead. No great

loss as things go ; still, I can't afford to lose him. Shall I ask Dering to help me out of my difficulties ? No ! never ! never ! Let ruin—outlawry—suicide itself come, rather than that ! ”

He sat down again, still twisting and turning the cheque absently between his fingers. “ Only a miserable eight pounds ! It's like offering a quarter of a biscuit to a man who is dying of starvation. Mr. Percy Osmond doesn't seem to have paid much attention to the art of caligraphy when he was young. Upon my word I never saw a signature that it would be easier to imitate. All that a clever fellow wants is a blank cheque on the same bank. With that, what wonders might be wrought ! I've heard Osmond say that he always sleeps with his keys under his pillow. Once obtain possession of them, the rest would be easy. But how to get them ? Suppose he gets drunk to night at Pincote, as he is nearly sure to do—why then —— ”

His pale face flushed, and a strange light came into his eyes. He mused for a minute or two, then he got up and rang the bell. Pierre answered it.

“ Ascertain at what hour the next train starts for London. ”

In a couple of minutes Pierre came back. “ The train for London passes Duxley station at four thirty-six, ” he said.

“ Good. You will just have time to catch it, ” said Mr. St. George. “ You will reach London in two hours and a quarter after you leave Duxley. Take a cab. Find out Boncher. Tell him to telegraph me first thing to-morrow morning, so that the message will reach me here not later than eight o'clock. His telegram must be to this effect : *You are wanted in town immediately on most important business.* Do you understand ? ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ An hour in London will be enough for you. You will be able to catch the eight o'clock down train, and ought to be back in this room by eleven at the latest. In fact, I shall expect to find you here when I return from Pincote. ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ And don't say a word to anyone about your journey. ”

Pierre bowed and left the room.

“ Invaluable fellow, that, ” said Kester aloud. The excitement that had stirred his blood so strangely a few minutes before was still upon him. He was like a man who had screwed himself up to some desperate resolve which he was determined to go through with at every cost.

He began slowly and deliberately to dress himself for dinner.

“ There's an old saying, ‘ Nothing risk nothing have, ’ ” he muttered to himself. “ The risk, in this case, seems to be nothing very desperate. If I fail, I shall be no worse off than I am now. If I succeed —— ” His face blanched as suddenly as if he had seen a ghost.

"I forgot that!" he whispered. "Dering sleeps in the next room to Osmond. What if he should be awake? Even when he does sleep, I've heard him say that the noise of a strange footstep is enough to rouse him. That is a difficulty I never thought of—the biggest difficulty of all."

He was still pondering over this difficulty, whatever it might be, when Osmond burst suddenly into the room.

"Not ready yet?" he said. "What a dilatory fellow you are! We shall have Dering in a devil of a temper if you don't make haste. I'll wait for you, if you don't mind my having a whiff meanwhile."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

"I SAY, Dering, it ain't twelve o'clock yet. You'll give me half an hour in the billiard-room before going to roost."

Percy Osmond was the speaker. He was getting out of the brougham which had brought the three gentlemen back from Pincote, where they had been dining. His voice was thick, and his gait unsteady. It was evident that he had been indulging rather too freely in Squire Culpepper's old port.

"You've surely had enough billiards for one night," said Lionel, good-humouredly. "I should have thought that the thrashing you gave young Cope would have satisfied you till to-morrow morning."

"I want to thrash you as I thrashed him."

"You shall thrash me as much as you like in the morning."

"This is what they call country hospitality!" said Osmond, turning to Kester. "Condemned to go to bed at eleven-thirty, like so many virtuous peasants in an opera. No more brandy, no more cigars, no more billiards. Nothing but everlasting bed. How very good we are in the country."

Kester laughed. "I told you that you would soon grow tired of the rural districts," he said.

"The rural districts themselves are all very nice and proper. I've nothing to say against them," said Mr. Osmond, as he sat down deliberately on the stairs, for they were all in the house by this time. "It's the people who live in them that I complain of. To send your guests to bed at eleven-thirty against their will, and to decline a simple game of billiards with one of them because you're afraid to acknowledge that he's the better player of the two—can this be your old English hospitality?"

"My dear Osmond, I will play you a game of billiards with pleasure, if your mind is so set on it," said Lionel. "I had no idea that you were so entêté in the matter. Come along. I daresay the lamps are still alight."

"Spoken like a nobleman," said Osmond, with tipsy gravity. "I accept your apology. Just order up some brandy and seltzer, there's a good fellow. St. George, you'll come and mark for us?"

"With pleasure," said Kester. "I'll join you in two minutes." He left them at the top of the stairs, they going towards the billiard-room. He was anxious to know whether Pierre had got back from London.

Yes, there sat Pierre in the dressing-room, quiet, watchful, and alert as ever. "Everything gone off all right?" said Mr. St. George.

"Everything has gone off quite right, sir," said Pierre.

"There will be no hitch as regards the telegram to-morrow morning, eh?"

"None whatever, sir."

"You need not sit up for me."

"Very well, sir."

"And yet—on second thoughts—you had perhaps better do so."

"Yes, sir."

Kester took off his dress-coat, put on an old shooting-jacket and a smoking-cap, and then went off to the billiard-room.

"Monsieur St. George mean mischief to-night," said Pierre, smiling to himself, and rubbing his hands slowly. "It not very often I see that light in his eye. When I do see it, I know it mean no good to somebody."

Kester found the two men chalking their cues. A servant was mixing a tumbler of brandy-and-seltzer for Osmond.

"I'll play you one game, a hundred up," said Osmond, as soon as the servant had left the room; "and I'll back my own play for ten pounds."

"You know that I never bet," said Lionel.

"I wouldn't give the snuff of a candle for a fellow who hasn't the pluck to back his own play, or his own opinion," said Osmond, with a sneer.

"I don't mind taking you," said Kester, quickly.

"Done!" said Osmond.

Lionel could not repress a movement of annoyance.

Both he and Osmond were good billiard-players, but he was the better of the two. This, however, was a point which Osmond, who was proud of his ability with the cue, would never concede. With Lionel, billiard-playing was an easy, natural gift; with Osmond it was the result of intense study and application. With the former it seemed the easiest thing in the world to play well—with the latter one of the most difficult. They had played much together during Osmond's visit to Park Newton, but Osmond could never lose with equanimity. He became disagreeable and quarrelsome the moment the game began to go against him, and, rather than have a scene under his own roof, Lionel would often play carelessly and allow his opponent to win game after game. Such

had been his intention in the present case till Kester foolishly accepted Osmond's bet. After that, to have lost the game would have been to lose Kester's money also ; and, foolish as was the bet, Lionel did not feel disposed to let Osmond benefit by it. Besides, to win Osmond's money was to touch him in his only vulnerable point, and it seemed to Lionel that he fully deserved to be made to smart.

The game began and went on with varying success. Osmond had drank far too much wine to play well, and Lionel, in a mood of utter indifference, missed stroke after stroke in a way that made Kester groan inwardly with vexation. Lionel, in truth, was disgusted with himself and disgusted with his opponent. "I'd far sooner follow the plough all my life on Gatehouse Farm, than be condemned to associate very much with men like this one," he said to himself. "And yet the world calls him a gentleman!"

"Call the game, St. George," cried Osmond, in his most insolent tone.

"Seventy-five—fifty-two, and your royal highness to play," said Kester.

"None of your sneers," said Osmond. "Seventy-five—fifty-two, eh?—Well, put me on three more.—And three more—very carefully.—A miss, by Jove! Ought to have had that middle pocket."

"Fifty-two—eighty-one," called St. George.

"How does your ten pounds look now, eh?" asked Osmond, with a chuckle.

"Not very rosy, I must confess," said Kester, with a shrug of his shoulders, and an appealing glance at his cousin.

"I hope you are prepared to pay up if you lose," said Osmond, insolently.

Kester started to his feet, but Lionel laid a hand on his shoulder.

"The game is not lost yet, Mr. Osmond," he said, coldly, but courteously.

"I guess it's in a dying state as far as you're concerned," said Osmond, coughing his little effeminate cough.

Lionel played and made a brilliant break of thirty.

"Eighty-one—eighty-two," called Kester, and there was a triumphant ring in his voice as he did so.

Osmond, white with the rage he could not hide, said nothing. He laid down his cigar, chalked his cue carefully, played, and missed.

"Just like my luck!" he cried, with an oath. "Dering, you might give a fellow something decent to smoke," he added, as he flung his cigar into the grate.

"The cigars are good ones. I smoke them myself," said Lionel, quietly.

"Anyhow, they are not fit to offer to a gentleman."

"I did not offer them to a gentleman. *You* helped yourself."

"Of course I did," he answered, not comprehending the irony of Lionel's remark. "And deuced bad smokes they are."

Lionel played and ran his score up to ninety-eight.

"Two more will make you game," said Kester.

"Two more would not have made him game if he hadn't played with my ball instead of his own," said Osmond, his lips livid with rage.

"I have not played with your ball instead of my own, Mr. Osmond."

"I repeat that you have. After the second cannon in your last break, you played with the wrong ball. You cannoned again, and then resumed play with your own ball."

"You are mistaken—indeed you are," said Lionel, earnestly.

"Oh, of course!" sneered Osmond. "It's not to be expected that you would say anything else."

"Did you see the stroke, Kester?" appealed Lionel.

"Certainly I did. You played with your own ball and not with Mr. Osmond's."

"Of course, Kester is bound to back up all we say! Our bankrupt relation can't afford to do otherwise. He has ten pounds on the game, and ——"

"By Heaven, Osmond!" burst out Mr. St. George. Lionel again laid his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"Mr. Osmond is my guest," he said, impressively. "In a moment of temper he has made use of certain expressions which he will be the first to regret to-morrow. Let us look upon the game as a drawn one, and, if need be, discuss it fully over breakfast in the morning."

"You have an uncommonly nice way of slipping out of a difficulty, Dering, I must confess. But it won't wash with me. The moment I find a man's not acting on the square, I brand him before the world as a cheat and a blackleg."

"Your language is very strong, Mr. Osmond."

"Not stronger than the case demands."

"I assure you again, on my word of honour, that you are mistaken in saying that I played with the wrong ball."

"And I assure you, on *my* word of honour, that I am not mistaken."

"Even granting for a moment that, in mistake, I did play the wrong ball, you cannot suppose that I would knowingly attempt to cheat you for the sake of a paltry ten pounds."

"But I can and do suppose it," said Osmond, vehemently. "The fact of your being a rich man has nothing to do with it. I have known a marquis cheat at cards for the sake of half a sovereign. Why shouldn't you try to cheat me out of ten pounds?"

"Your experience of the world, Mr. Osmond, seems to have been a very unfortunate one," said Lionel, coldly.

"Perhaps it has, and perhaps it hasn't," said Osmond, savagely. "Anyhow, it has taught me to be on the look out for rogues."

"Osmond, are you mad, or drunk, or both?" cried Kester.

"A little of both," said Lionel, sternly. "If he were not under my roof, I would horsewhip him till he went down on his knees and proclaimed himself the liar and bully he really is."

Osmond was in the act of lifting a glass of brandy-and-seltzer to his lips as Lionel spoke. He waited, without drinking, till Lionel had done. "You called me a liar, did you?" he said. "Then, take that!" and as he spoke, he flung the remaining contents of the glass into Lionel's face, and sent the glass itself crashing to the other side of the room.

Another instant and Dering's terrible fingers were closed round Osmond's throat. This last insult was more than he could bear. His self-control was flung to the winds. Osmond's nerveless frame quivered and shook helplessly in the strong man's grasp. He was as powerless to help himself as any child would have been. His eyes were starting from his head, and his face beginning to turn livid, when Kester started forward.

"Don't choke him, Li," he said. "Don't kill the beggar quite."

"You mean, contemptible hound!" said Dering, as he loosened his grasp and flung Osmond away: who staggered and fell to the ground, gasping for breath, and hardly knowing for the moment what had befallen him.

With a few wild gasps and a tug or two at his cravat, he seemed to partially recover himself. Raising himself on his left elbow, he put his right hand deep down inside his waistcoat, and from some secret pocket there he drew what looked like a toy pistol, but which was a deadly weapon enough in competent hands. Before either Kester or Lionel knew what he was about, he had taken point-blank aim at the latter, and fired. But drink had made his hand unsteady, and the bullet intended for Lionel's brain passed harmlessly through his hair, and lodged in the panelling behind.

Kester sprang at him, wrenched the pistol from his hand, and flung it to the other end of the room. As he did so, the thought passed through his mind: "If that bullet had only been aimed two inches lower, what a difference it would have made to me!" "Osmond, are you going to turn assassin?" he said. "You must come with me." He helped him up from the ground, took his right arm firmly within his, and led him towards the door.

"That is the way we serve those who insult us out in the west," said Osmond. "Only: for once, I missed my aim. But I'll fight it out with him to-morrow, anyhow he likes."

"To-morrow we will settle our little differences as gentlemen of honour should settle such things," said Kester, soothingly. And with these words he led him from the room.

Lionel sank back on a chair, sick, weary, and disgusted; and so sat without moving till Kester came back, some ten minutes later.

"What have you done with Osmond?" he said.

"I have given him in charge of my man, who won't leave him till he has seen him safely in bed. He would insist on having more brandy. In ten minutes he will be sleeping the sleep of the drunken."

Lionel rose with a look of pain, and pressed one hand to the side of his head.

"Got one of your bad headaches?" asked Kester.

"Yes: about the worst that I ever remember to have had."

"Is there no cure for them?"

"None, but patience."

"But, surely, they may be alleviated?"

"I have tried remedies without end, but to no purpose."

"Will you let me make you up a mixture from a prescription of my own? I have all the materials at hand. If I make it up, will you promise to take it? I don't say that it will cure your headache, but I do believe that it will give you relief."

There was a strangely anxious, almost haggard look on his face as he spoke thus, and yet his eyes were never once bent on Lionel. He had picked up one of the cues, and seemed to be busily examining it. When he had done speaking, he waited for his cousin's answer with parted lips, in a sort of breathless hush.

Lionel laughed a rather dismal laugh.

"Well, if you have any faith in your mixture, I don't mind trying it," he said. "It can't make the pain worse, and there is just a faint chance that it may ease it a bit—or that I may fancy that it does, which is pretty much the same thing."

The cue dropped from Kester's fingers and rattled on the floor. "What was that?" he said, suddenly, looking round with a shiver. "I could have sworn that somebody touched me on the shoulder."

"There is no one here but ourselves," said Lionel, languidly. The pain was almost more than he could bear up against.

Kester recovered his equanimity after an impatient "Pish" at his folly, and the two men went slowly out of the billiard-room together. Outside the door Kester whispered in his cousin's ear, "I will go and fetch the mixture, and be back again in two minutes." Lionel nodded, and Kester was gone.

"Why need he have whispered to me?" asked Lionel of himself. "There was no one to overhear him. There's something queer about him to-night. A little touch of the blues, perhaps; and yet he never seems to drink very hard."

Lionel went off to his rooms—a bedroom and drawing-room en suite, next to the rooms occupied by Osmond. He took off his coat and tie, and unbuttoned his waistcoat, and then sat down with his feet on the fender, waiting for Kester.

Lionel Dering had been troubled with occasional headaches of a very

distressing kind ever since he could remember anything, and he had quite made up his mind that he must be so troubled till the end of the chapter. He had no faith in his cousin's proposed remedy, but he would take it simply to oblige Kester.

Kester was not long away. He entered the room presently, carrying a small silver tankard in his hand.

"I can't tell you how sorry I feel for this night's work," said Lionel.

"What have you done that you should feel sorry for?" asked Kester, as he put down the tankard on the table.

"I ought to have left the billiard-room instead of flying at poor little Osmond in the brutal way I did. He was half drunk to-night, and didn't know what he was about. He would have apologised in the morning, and then everything would have come right."

"Considering the provocation you received, I think that you acted throughout with the greatest forbearance. Osmond, to say the least of it, is not worthy of any serious consideration."

"But you will see him in the morning, won't you, and act as peace-maker between us, if it be possible to do so?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I do wish it. The brawl was an utterly disreputable piece of business. I ought not to have let my temper overmaster me. I ought, under no circumstances, to have forgotten that Percy Osmond was my guest."

"Well, never mind all that now. We can discuss the affair fully in the morning. See, I have brought you the mixture I spoke of for your head. I think you will find that it will do you good."

He held out the tankard as he spoke. His pale face looked paler than ever to-night—his black moustache blacker than ever; but his restless eyes seemed to fix themselves anywhere rather than on his cousin's face. Lionel took the tankard from Kester's hand, and drank off the contents at a draught. Then he wiped his lips with his pocket-handkerchief, and having no coat on, he stuffed the handkerchief carelessly under his braces for the time being.

"And now I'll leave you to sweet slumber and happy dreams," said Kester, as he took back the empty tankard. "Your head will be better by morning, I do not doubt. Good night."

"Good night," responded Lionel, languidly, from his chair by the fire.

Kester went softly out, and closed the door lightly behind him.

Five minutes passed away, and then Lionel awoke with a start to find that he had unconsciously fallen into a doze over the fire. The pain in his head certainly seemed a little better already. But when he rose to his feet, he found that he could hardly stand. His limbs seemed too weak to support him, and he was overcome with a dull, heavy drowsiness such as he had never felt before. The room and everything in it began to rock slowly up and down like the cabin of a ship at sea.

There were only two candles on the table, but Lionel seemed to see a dozen. Sleep—sleep of the deepest—seemed to be numbing both his heart and his brain. Consciousness was fast leaving him. He staggered rather than walked to the couch on the opposite side of the room. He reached it. He had just sense enough to fling himself on it, and then he remembered nothing more.

He remembered nothing more till he awoke next morning. It was broad daylight when he opened his eyes. He had to gather his wits together and to think for a minute or two before he could call to mind how and why it was that he found himself lying there, on his dressing-room couch, instead of in his bed as usual. Then all the events of the evening flashed across his mind in a moment; the quarrel in the billiard-room; the pistol-shot; the pain in his head; the draught given him by his cousin, and the strange effect it had upon him. "It must have been a very powerful narcotic," said Lionel to himself. "But, at all events, it has cured my headache."

By turning his head he could see the timepiece on the bureau. It was nine o'clock, an hour and a half past his usual time for rising. But, late as it was, he felt a strange disinclination for getting up. He felt as if he could lie there all day without moving. His mind was perfectly clear; the pain had left his head; but his limbs seemed heavy, useless, inert. He would stay there for just ten minutes longer, he said to himself, and then he would positively get up. Kester would be waiting breakfast for him, and he was anxious to know how Osmond was this morning, and what recollection he retained of the fracas overnight.

But Osmond was up already. He could hear him moving about the next room. So far all was well. But what would be the result of their quarrel? Osmond must leave Park Newton, and at once. No other course was—Now that he listened more particularly, he could hear the footsteps of more than one person in the next room—of more than two—of several. And there were footsteps in the corridor, passing to and fro as if in a hurry. There was a whispering, too, as if close outside his door; then the hurried muttering of many voices in Osmond's room; then the clash of two doors far away in the opposite wing of the house.

What could it all mean? Was Osmond ill? Or was he simply having his luggage packed, with the view of leaving for London by the forenoon train? Lionel sprang to his feet without another moment's delay. The sudden change of position made him dizzy. He pressed his fingers over both his eyes for a moment or two while he recovered himself. Again there was a noise of whispering in the corridor outside. Lionel made a step or two forward towards the door, and then came to a dead stop—horror-stricken by something which he now saw for the first time. The pocket-handkerchief which he had stuffed carelessly under his braces overnight had fallen to the ground when he sprang from the couch. As

he stooped to pick it up, he saw that it was stained with blood. But whose blood? It could not be his own—there was nothing the matter with him. But if not his, whose?

Now that he looked at himself more closely, there were crimson streaks on the front of his shirt where the handkerchief had rested against it—and on his wristbands there were other streaks of the same ominous colour.

He had picked up the handkerchief, and was gazing at it in a sort of maze of dread and perplexity, when there came a sudden imperative knocking at his dressing-room door. Next moment the door was opened, and, lifting up his bewildered eyes, Lionel saw clustered in the doorway the frightened faces of five or six of his own servants.

"What is the matter?" he asked, and his voice sounded strangely unfamiliar both to himself and others.

"Oh, if you please, sir—Mr. Osmond—the gentleman in the next room!" gasped Pearce the butler.

"What is the matter with Mr. Osmond?"

"He has been murdered in the dead of night!"

Lionel caught at the edge of a table for support. His brain reeled—all the pulses of his being seemed to stand still in awful dread.

"Murdered! Percy Osmond murdered!" He breathed the words rather than spoke them aloud. Then for the first time he saw that all those frightened eyes clustered in the doorway were fixed, not on him, but on the terrible token which he was still holding in his hand. He dropped it with a shudder, and strode forward towards the door. They all shrank back as though he were stricken with the plague.

"Great Heaven! they cannot suspect that I have done the deed!" he whispered to himself. "We must see to this at once," he said aloud.

No one spoke. There was a dead, ominous silence. The crimson stains on his shirt were visible, and every eye was now fixed on them. Lionel paused for a moment at the threshold to gather nerve.

As he stood thus, Pierre Janvard came quickly out of Osmond's room, carrying some small article between the thumb and finger of his right hand. His face was paler than usual, and his half-closed eyes had a sort of feline expression in them which was not pleasant to look upon.

"If you please, sir, is this your property?" he said, addressing himself to Lionel, and displaying a small jet stud set in filagree gold.

Lionel's fingers went up instinctively to his shirt front in search of the missing stud.

"Yes, that is my property," he said. "Where did you find it?"

"I found it just now, sir, clutched in the hand of Mr. Percy Osmond, who lies murdered in the next room."

(To be continued.)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AMONG THE RURAL POOR.

THE builder with careful skill fits in the stones which form the arch ; but until the keystone is there his work is shapeless and insecure. The artist spreads the rich tints of gold and crimson over the painted windows, but until the sunlight streams through it those hues are cold and dim. Without a strong, deep sense of religion fixed in the very centre of a man's heart and mind, the finest intellectual powers can never be anything but a useless mass of glittering fragments. Unless a clear and reasonable religious belief warms and lights up the daily life, the sweetest natural qualities are but pale and torpid. Yet it is of this mighty keystone, this life-giving ray, that a self-opinionated town-bred minority, thinking exclusively of their own peculiar case, and nothing of the spiritual wants of their poorer brethren in rural districts, would deprive the mass of our common people ; and such an act of tyranny is calmly discussed among a nation which boasts of its freedom, and advocated by those who wear on their breasts a specious badge, which they dare to misname the badge of liberty.

This expression, "an act of tyranny," may perhaps at first seem overstrained and unjust ; but let any impartial person pay with us a brief visit to a few of the cottages in a Devon or Somerset village, and we think he will own our words are not exaggerated.

When we enter the first house, the light of a November evening is beginning to wane. On the hearth stands the mother of the family, a pale, depressed-looking woman, out of whose face the traces of a brighter intelligence which may have been there in her girlhood have been worn by the constant passing over it of the heavy hand of care, and makes belief of a fire by blowing up a few embers of smouldering turf. By-and-by the children come trotting in from school. They eat their supper, which often enough is nothing but dry bread, and then sit down to shiver in their scanty frocks, and play with a few broken toys, which make us feel rather sad when we think of the gaily painted treasures scattered in such lavish profusion about the nursery floor at home. The mother is very busy with odds and ends of household work ; but even while she is busy she often casts uneasy glances towards the door. The minutes drag on, and as she looks up at the clock she is glad to find that it is time to send her little ones off to bed, so that they may escape the ugly sight which she knows too well will soon be here. When first she married, she resolved that if ever a little group of children should stand around her she would send them to rest at night with words of prayer in their hearts and on their lips. That good resolution has long ago been broken down by the force of sin and sorrow. But before the children can move to go, a heavy, unsteady step draws near the door. The mother

trembles and shrinks back ; the children look up with half frightened, half curious eyes. Is it a man that enters, or is it a hideous, degraded caricature of humanity ? There are rough words and rougher deeds in the cottage that night.

Let us cease our boastful talk about the progress of the age, about the triumphs of intellect, and the march of science, and try to find out some practical way in which to keep drunkenness far from our cottage hearths. Who could be cruel enough to wish to take away from the children that come back to such a home as this, the one little ray of higher light which shines in upon their moral being from half an hour's plain, wholesome religious teaching at school ? If the school is secular, and secular only, what is to be expected but that a drunken son will grow up as exact a duplicate of the drunken father as the poisonous flower which flourished this spring is an exact duplicate of the poisonous flower which blossomed on the same stem last year ? If the school is secular, and secular only, what is to be expected but that the girl, whose mother has grown partly apathetic to spiritual things from the mere dull, listless wretchedness of her existence, and partly careless of them from constant disuse, will lead, in after years, a prayerless life ?

In the next house in which we find ourselves two women are sitting. At first sight all here seems to be going on fairly enough. The dish-covers and stewpans on the wall gleam as brightly as the mirrors in the drawing-room of a duchess. In the tall cupboard with glass doors are enshrined many a choice bit of china. On the little side-table are a few neatly bound books. The elder woman has a plausible respectability of manner which might become the housekeeper at the Squire's. The younger has a pretty face, and the smile with which she greets us does it full justice. Surely, we say, the child who sleeps in the cradle by this hearth will unfold the petals of its heart and its mind in a pure home atmosphere here, and will need no fostering sunbeam outside these walls. But look a little closer. There is no wedding-ring on the hand with which the young mother smooths the cradle-quilt of her little one. Pass by this door to-night when the parson and his family are supposed to be safe within the gates of the vicarage, and we shall hear the old woman's voice raised in shrill tones which are not exactly tones of blessing or of edifying. If the school is secular, and secular only, the tiny daughter now sleeping in the cradle must lose her bes and perhaps her only chance of building up around her a fence of strong principles which may keep her from falling at the first onset of temptation, as her mother has done. If the school is secular, and secular only, the hoary head of this child, should she ever live to attain to it, will probably be, like that of her grandmother, anything but a crown of glory.

Our third visit is to the house of a small farmer ; for in our quiet rural districts the children of the small farmer and small tradesman are

generally brought up at the village school side by side with the children of the labourer. Out of doors there is no lack of signs of busy prosperity. A threshing machine is whirring and humming in the yard like a giant cockchafer. The warm linny is sweet with the breath of sleek cows and with fragrant hay. The geese cackle on the pond : the horses rattle their chains merrily as they galop in from the plough. A dog, with self-important barks, folds the bleating sheep. But where is she who was once, as it were, the centre-spring which set in motion all this active machinery of life ?

In a darkened room she lies, pale and still as a snowdrop which a rough March wind has torn from the stem. What quiet resignation sits waiting in those half-closed eyes ! What an eloquent tale of a life of labour, and a death of long drawn-out suffering, is told by that work-hardened, but now wasted hand ! God's minister comes and reads words rich with blessed meaning : but the worn-out body will hardly let the mind heed them. They bring her books in which are written the thoughts of the good and wise, but her heavy eyelids are not raised even to glance at them. They sing, to soothe her, a sweet low hymn, and one in which she used to join of old, but the weakened ear cannot bear the sound. She is no lady, who has been taught by long refined intellectual training to make mind triumph over matter. Her life has been spent in hard manual labour, and the shattered body in these last hours asserts its power over the struggling spirit. All at once there is a sound of little feet on the stairs ; a child, so young that she can smile even upon death, comes trotting in proudly to repeat to her mother the text just learnt at school : "In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you." A light comes into the dying mother's face, for God has sent an angel to her side. If the school was secular, and secular only, could those sweet words of comfort have reached that mother's ear ?

These are but a few instances which prove to those who go in and out among the poor in our agricultural districts, that until we can establish a far higher scale of morality in our cottage homes, and that as long as, according to the natural laws of humanity, disease and death visit the dwellings of those who toil as well as of those who think and rest, religious teaching at school is far more necessary for the children of the labouring classes than for those of any other rank in the community. With those who are professed unbelievers, the examples we have given will, of course, have no weight ; but with those good men, and we believe that there are good men who, through mistaken reason, advocate entire secular education for the poor, we think that these simple pictures, drawn from daily experience in village life, must have at least some little influence if they would look at the matter impartially. It is to them that we would address ourselves.

We believe that these men, looking at the subject through the medium

of their own liberal education and refined feeling, are little aware how very far from high and clear is still the moral standard in our country people. How much even elementary knowledge they still have to be taught about many things, how wide the gulf still is on many points between them and the classes immediately above them ! It is one thing to sit in a well-furnished library in May Fair or Belgravia and write theoretically about the rural poor, and quite another to go about among them, up and down muddy lanes, from cottage to cottage, sitting by their scantily warmed hearths, listening to the moan of the sickly baby and the rambling tales of the old granny, and learning little by little to know something about their real home trials and temptations. We use the expression learning *little by little* with a strong emphasis ; for there is no class of people in Europe so difficult to grow familiar with as the agricultural labourers of Devon and Somerset. When the lady visitor comes in, the wife wraps herself up in a veil of commonplace civil speeches ; when the squire or clergyman draws near, the husband entrenches himself behind a fence of stolid dullness ; and it is only by constant quiet acts of kindness, by words of sympathy spoken again and again, that we can gradually win our way into their confidence. It is, therefore, very difficult, nay, almost impossible, for anyone who has not lived for some time among them to write or speak truthfully on so vital a point as the education of their children.

No doubt those who advocate a secular education have before their minds' eye the finished picture of an ideal village schoolmaster. He is to be a man of grand broad faith, a true Christian in the highest sense of the term, who, through the very strength and intensity of his own belief, will be able to look with an equal eye on children of every creed, and, though he does not speak to them directly of sacred things, will keep up a religious atmosphere among them. There have been, and no doubt are still, some few such men in the world. Dr. Arnold, even if he had been forbidden to preach to his boys, would have gained over them an influence for good which many of them would have felt throughout their lives. William the Silent, had he been a schoolmaster instead of a prince, would have gone about grandly yet simply among his pupils, moulding their thoughts before they were uttered, and, even if he had not spoken to them of God, would have made the class-room a church. But Arnolds and Williams of Nassau, or rather, we should say, inferior men after their type, are not exactly to be found every day on the benches of an English training college. Our village schoolmaster is in general a very commonplace mortal, who is a little too fond of showing his own self-importance, and getting out of his depth in his talk ; who means well in the main, but is very far from being the calm, philosophical man which he is portrayed to be, no doubt, in the warm imaginations of the apostles of secular school education.

With regard to the nature of religious teaching in our schools, it cannot

be too simple and at the same time too picturesque. We have scant respect for the school where the children say through without a mistake the names of all the kings of Israel and Judah in succession. We smile somewhat disrespectfully when we hear the school inspector set the scholars some such Scripture puzzle as "Who was Zaphnath Paaneah?" But we love to find the little ones at home in the beautiful old Bible stories. We think that such instruction would be given best by a woman, and we should be glad to see the religious department in our village schools entirely made over to the mistress.

The children of our rural poor leave school to go out to work at a very early age. For many reasons this is, of course, to be regretted. It is depressing, in an intellectual point of view, to find the boy who can scarcely write a round hand leading the plough all day; and the girl who can hardly stumble through a page of the "Pilgrim's Progress" kept early and late at the washing-tub. Still, any law forcing the children of the poor to stay at school till a certain age would be, in the present state of things, to some extent, an arbitrary and a harsh one, as far as our rural districts are concerned; for as long as wages remain as they now are in the West of England, and prices as high, it is absolutely necessary that the younger members of a labourer's family should begin as soon as possible to add their mite to the family purse.

It is this fact of the children's going out to work so early which makes us repeat again that the religious teaching in our village schools cannot be too plain and too lively. It must put the Bible before the children so simply that even their just awakening minds cannot fail to take in something of its deep and glorious meaning, and yet, at the same time, so vividly that Jacob's Well and the blue waters of Galilee will stand out before their young imaginations as if they had seen them with their bodily eyes. Such teaching as this will cling about a child's memory almost without his being conscious of it; and as the boy sits in his hut on a rainy day under the hedge keeping off the birds from the newly sown corn (the first work always, on a West Country farm, of the labourer's child), he will go over and over again with delight his school Scripture lessons, and will extract from them a meaning which he failed before to gain. The subject will have been made attractive to him, and his idle mind, wanting employment, will be glad sooner or later to dwell upon it. Much may be done to make up to our village boys and girls for their early leaving school, and to perfect them in their Scripture knowledge, by opening for them Sunday Bible classes. The clergy, whose Sunday work is generally cut out for them, have seldom time or strength for such undertakings; but it is exactly the work for an active, zealous laity, and most of all for ladies who wish to do something more on the Sabbath besides showing their own best bonnets and criticising those of their neighbours.

The teaching of these Bible classes should be much the same as the

religious teaching of the school ; it should be simple, it should be earnest, it should be full of word pictures of Bible scenery, and of Eastern customs, and pointed now and then with homely but striking illustrations. Our village boys and girls and village young men and women (for if the Bible class is popular they will still continue to attend it, even after they are married) like to feel that their teacher treats them as friends, and not as so many receptacles into which so much Scripture knowledge has to be stuffed. A class of this sort is rendered much more effective by the teacher, always before or after his religious instruction, speaking a few familiar words to some of his pupils about their home concerns, or even joining in a short talk with them all on any matter of general interest.

Above all, we must make the teaching of our Bible classes as broad as possible, consistently with soundness. There is nothing which frightens young people, especially very young men, so much as dogma. Let us try, then, to put on our young men and women the whole armour of God ; but be careful, as we do so, not to turn it into a strait-waistcoat. We have dwelt thus for a few sentences on Bible classes, because we think they form an essential part, and one in which the laity can have an active share, of the religious education of the poor, and because we happen to have so much experience in them.

To return, in conclusion, to the village school proper. We cannot understand how any nation can wish the knowledge of the Bible to die out amongst their working classes, as it assuredly will die out, at least in our retired rural districts, if it ceases to be taught the children of our labouring people. A little while ago a diocesan inspector, who, by virtue of his office, inquired more especially into the Bible knowledge of a village school, went through the following strange experiences :

Q. Who was Gamaliel? A. A famous mountain near Tarsus, at the foot of which St. Paul was brought up. Q. Who was Cornelius? A. (with some hesitation). Please, sir, was he not a music man? Inspector (bewilderedly). A music man? A. (given more boldly). Yes, sir ; because, you know, he was one of the Italian band.

This is a story to laugh over, and yet it is one to cry over too. The case was, no doubt, one of peculiarly gross ignorance, but it shows the way in which the tide is setting among our village schools with regard to that book which even infidels allow to be the noblest composition which ever flowed from a human pen.

When the religion of old Rome (Pagan religion though it was) became but a shadow to the mass of the people, the decline of the Roman Empire was not far off. When reason reigned in France instead of Christianity, anarchy reigned with her. Let England take timely warning, and, holding fast by the Book to keep which for her a Sidney fought, and a Latimer died, be great and Christian England still.

Alice King.

THE CRIES IN THE TREES.

WHEN the rumours first began, I can't tell you. They must have had a beginning : but nobody recollected when the beginning was. It was said that curious noises were heard in the neighbourhood of Sandstone Torr. One spoke of it, and another spoke of it, at intervals of perhaps a month apart, until people grew *accustomed* to hear talk of the strange sounds that went shrieking round the Torr on a windy night. Dovey the blacksmith, going up to the Torr on some errand, declared he had heard them at midday : but he was not generally believed.

The Torr was so remote from the ordinary routes of traffic, that the noises were not likely to be heard often, even allowing that there were noises to hear. Shut in by trees and in a lonely spot, people had no occasion to pass it. The narrow lane, by which it was approached from Church Dykely, led to nowhere else ; on other sides it was surrounded by fields. Stephen Radcliffe was asked about these noises ; but he positively denied having heard any, except those caused by the wind. *That* shrieked around the house as if so many witches were at work, he said, and it always had as long as he could remember. Which was true.

Stephen's inheritance of all the money on the death of his young half-brother Francis—young, compared to him—seemed to have been only the signal for him and his wife to become more unsociable, and they were bad enough before. They shut themselves up in the Torr, with that sister of hers, Eunice Gibbon, who acted as their servant, and saw nobody. Neither visitors nor tradespeople were encouraged there ; they preferred to live without help from anybody : butcher or baker or candlestick maker. The produce of the farm supplied ordinary daily needs, and anything else that might be wanted was fetched from the village by Eunice Gibbon—as tall and strapping a woman as Mrs. Stephen, and just as grim and silent. Even the postman had orders to leave any letters that might arrive, addressed to the Torr, at Church Dykely post-office to be called for. Possibly it was a sense of their own unfitness for society that caused them to keep aloof from it. Stephen Radcliffe had always been a sullen, boorish man, in spite of his descent from the ancient Druids—or whatever the high-caste tribes might be, that he traced back from ; and as to his wife, she was just as much like a lady as a pig's like a windmill.

The story of the queer noises gained ground, and in the course of time, it coursed about pretty freely. One evening in the late spring—but the report had been abroad then for months and months—a circumstance caused it to be discussed at Dyke Manor. Giles, our groom, strolling out one night to give himself an airing, chanced to get near the Torr, and came home full of it. "Twere exactly," he declared, "like

a lot o' witches howling in the air." Just as Stephen Radcliffe had said of the wind. The Squire told Giles it must be the owls; the servants thought Mr. Radcliffe might be giving his wife a beating; Mrs. Todhetley imagined it might be only the bleating of the young lambs. Giles protested it could come from neither owls nor lambs: and as to Radcliffe's beating Becca, he'd be hardly likely to try it on, for she'd beat back again. Tod and I were at school, and heard nothing of it till we got home in summer.

"Johnny! There's the noise!"

We two had been over to the Court to see the Sterlings; it was only the second day of our holidays; and were taking the cross-cut home through the fields, which led us past Sandstone Torr. It was the twilight of a summer's evening. The stars were beginning to show themselves; in the north-west the colours were the most beautiful opal conceivable; the round silver moon sailed in the clear blue sky. Crossing the stile by the grove of trees that on three sides surrounded the Torr, we had reached the middle of the next field, when a kind of faint wailing cry, indescribably painful, brought us both to a standstill.

"It must be the noise they talk of," repeated Tod.

Where did it come from? What was it? Standing on the path in the centre of the open field, we turned about and gazed around; but could see nothing to produce or cause it. It seemed to be overhead, ever so far up in the air: an unearthly, imploring cry, or rather a succession of cries; faint enough, as if the sound spent itself before it reached us, but still distinct; and just as much like what witches might be supposed to make, witches in pain, as any cries could be. I'd have given a month's pocket-money not to have heard it.

"Is it in the Torr?" exclaimed Tod, breaking the silence. "I don't see how that could be, though."

"It is up in the air, Tod."

We stood utterly puzzled; and gazing at the Torr. At as much of it, at least, as could be seen—the tops of the chimneys, and the sugar-loaf of a tower shooting up to its great height amid them. The windows of the house and its old stone walls, on which the lichen vegetated, were hidden by the clustering old trees, in full foliage then.

"Hark! There it is again!"

The same horrible, low, distressing sound, something between a howl and a wail; enough to make a stout man shiver in his shoes.

"Is it a woman's cry, Tod?"

"I don't know, lad. It's like a person being murdered and crying out for help."

"Radcliffe can't be tanning his wife."

"Not he, Johnny. She'd take care of that. Besides, they've never been cat-and-dog. Birds of a feather: that's what they are. Oh, by

Jove ! there it comes again ! Just listen to it ! I don't like this at all, Johnny. It must be witches, and nothing else."

Decidedly it must be. It came from the air. The open fields lay around, white and still under the moonlight, and nothing was on their surface of any kind, human or animal. Now again ! that awful cry, rising on the bit of breeze there was, and dying away in pain to a faint echo.

"Let us go to the Torr, Johnny, and ask Radcliffe if he hears it !"

We bounded forward under the cry, which rose again and again incessantly ; but in nearing the house it seemed to get further off and to be higher than ever in the air. Leaping the gate into the lane, we got to the front door, seized the bell-handle, and pulled at it till somebody came. It was Mrs. Radcliffe ; a blue cap and red roses atop of her straggling hair. Holding the candle above her head, she peered at us with her small, sly eyes.

"Oh, is it you, young gentlemen ! Do you want anything ? Will you walk in ?"

I was about to say No, when Tod pushed me aside and strode up the damp stone passage. They did not make enough fires in the house to keep out the damp. As he told me afterwards, he wanted to get in to listen. But there was no sound at all to be heard ; the house seemed as still as death. Wherever the cries might come from, it was certainly not from inside the Torr.

"Radcliffe went over to Wire-Piddle this afternoon, and he's not back yet," she said ; opening the parlour door when we got to the hall. "Did you want him ? You must ha' been in a hurry by the way you worked the bell."

She put the candle down on the table. Her work lay there—a brown woollen stocking about half knitted.

"There is the most extraordinary noise outside that you ever heard, Mrs. Radcliffe," began Todd, seating himself without ceremony on the old-fashioned mahogany sofa. "It startled us. Did you hear it in here ?"

"I have heard no noise at all," she answered quietly, taking up the stocking and beginning to knit standing. "What was it like ?"

"An awful shrieking and crying. Not loud ; faint enough nearly for dying cries. As it is not in your house—and we did not think it was, or could be—it must be, I should say, in the air."

"Ay," she said, "just so. I can tell you what it is, Mr. Joseph : the night birds."

Tod looked at her, plying the knitting-needles so quickly, and looked at me, and there was a silence. I wondered what was keeping him from speaking. He suddenly bent his head forward.

"Have you heard any talk of these noises, Mrs. Radcliffe ? People say they are to be heard almost any night."

"I've not heard no talk, but I have heard the noise," she answered, whisking out a needle and beginning another of the three-cornered rows. "One evening about a month ago I was a coming home up the lane, and I hears a curious kind o' prolonged cry. It startled me at the moment, for, thinks I, it must be in this house; and I hastens in. No. Eunice said she had heard no cries: as how should she, when there was nobody but herself in-doors? So I goes out again, and listens," added Mrs. Radcliffe, lifting her eyes from the stocking and fixing them on Tod, "and then I finds out what it really was—the night birds."

"The night birds?" he echoed.

"'Twas the night birds, Mr. Joseph," she repeated, with an emphatic nod. "They had congregated in these here thick trees, and was crying like so many human beings. I have heard the same thing many a time in Wiltshire when I was a girl. I used to go there to stay with aunt and uncle."

"Well, I never heard anything like it before," returned Tod. "It's just as though some unquiet spirit was riding in the air."

"Mayhap it sounds so afore you know what it is. Let me give you young gentlemen a drop o' my homemade cowslip wine."

She had whisked the decanter of wine and some glasses off the side-board with her long arms, before we could say Yes or No. We are famous for cowslip wine down there, but this was extra good. Tod took another glass of it, and got up to go.

"Don't be frightened if you hear the noise again, now that you know what it is," she said, quite in a motherly way. "For my part I wish some o' the birds was shot. They don't do no good to nobody."

"As there is not any house about here, except this, the thought naturally arises that the noise may be inside it—until you know to the contrary," remarked Tod.

"I wish it was inside it—we'd soon stop it by wringing all their necks," cried she. "You can listen," she added, suddenly going into the hall and flinging wide every door that opened from it and led to the different passages and rooms. "Go along to any part of the house you like, and hearken for yourselves, young gentlemen."

Tod laughed at the suggestion. The passages were all still and cold, and there was nothing to hear. Taking up the candle, she lighted us to the front door. Outside stood the woman-servant Eunice, a basket on her arm, and just about to ring. Mrs. Radcliffe enquired if she had heard any noise.

"Only them shrieking birds up there," she answered readily. "They be in full cry to-night."

"They've been a startling these gentlemen finely."

"There bain't nothing to be startled at," said the woman, roughly, turning a look of contempt upon us. "If I was the master I'd shoot

as many as I could get at ; and if that didn't get rid of 'em, I'd cut the trees down."

"They make a queerer noise than any birds I ever heard before," said Tod, standing his ground to say it.

"They does," assented the woman. "That queer, that some folks believes it's the shrieks o' the skeleton on the gibbet."

Pleasant ! When I and Tod had to pass within a few yards of its corner. The posts of the old gibbet were there still, but the skeleton had mouldered away long ago. A bit of chain, some few inches long, adhered to its fastening in the post still, and rattled away on windy nights.

"What donkeys we were, Johnny, not to know birds' cries when we heard them !" exclaimed Tod, as we tumbled over the gate and went flying across the field. "Hark ! Listen ! There it is again !"

There it was. The same despairing kind of wail, faintly rising and dying on the air. Tod stood in hushed silence.

"Johnny, I believe that's a human cry !—I could almost fancy," he went on, "that it is speaking words. No bird, that ever I met with, native or foreign, could make the like."

It died away. But still occurred the obvious question, What was it, and whence did it come ? With nothing but the empty air above and around us, that was difficult to answer.

"It's not in the trees—I vow it," said Tod ; "it's not inside the Torr ; it can't rise up from under the ground. I say, Johnny, is it a case of ghost ?"

The wailing arose again as he spoke, as if to reprove him for his levity. I'd rather have met a ghost ; ay, and a real ghost ; than have carried away that sound to haunt me.

We tore home as fast as our good heels could take us, and told of the night's adventure. After the Pater had blown us up for being late, he treated us to a dose of ridicule. Human cries, indeed ? Ghosts and witches ? I might be excused, he said, being a muff ; but Joe must be just going back to his childhood. That settled Tod. Of all disagreeable things he most hated to be ridiculed.

"It must have been the old birds in those trees, after all, Johnny," said he, as we went up to bed. "I think the moon makes people fanciful."

And after a sound night's rest we woke up to the bright sunshine, and thought no more of the cries.

That morning, being close to Pitchley's farm, we called in to see Mrs. Frank Radcliffe. But she was not to be seen. Her brother, David Skate, just come in to his midday dinner, came forward to meet us in his fustian suit. Annet had been hardly able to keep about for some time, he said, but this was the first day she had regularly broken down so as to be in bed.

"It has brought on a touch of fever," said he, pressing the bread-and-cheese and cider upon us, which he had ordered in.

"What has?" asked Tod.

"This perpetual torment that she keeps her mind in. But she can't help it, poor thing, so it's not fair to blame her," added David Skate.

"It gets worse instead of better, and I don't see what the end of it is to be. I've thought for some time she might go and break up to-day."

"Why to-day?"

"Because it is the anniversary of her husband's death, Master Johnny. He died twelve months ago to-day."

Back went my memory to the morning we heard of it. When the Pater was scolding Dwarf Giles in the yard, and Tod stood laughing at the young ducks taking to the water, and Stephen Radcliffe loomed into sight, grim and surly, to disclose to us the tidings that the post had brought in—his brother Frank's death.

"Has she still got that curious fancy in her, David?—that he did not come by his death fairly."

"She's got it in her, and she can't get it out of her," returned David. "Why, Master Johnny, it's nothing but that that's killing her. Ay, and that's not too strong a word, sir, for I do believe she'll die of it, unless something can be done to satisfy her mind, and give her rest," he added earnestly. "She thinks there was foul play used in some way, and that Stephen Radcliffe was at the bottom of it."

We had never heard a word about the fancy since that night when Annet first spoke of it at the stile, and supposed she had forgotten it long ago. The Squire and Mrs. Todhetley had often noticed how ill she looked, but they put it down to grief for Francis and to her anxiety about the farm.

"No, she has said no more since then," observed David. "She took up an idea that the Squire ascribed it to a wandering brain; and so has held her peace since."

"Is her brain wandering, do you think?" asked Tod.

"Well, I don't know," returned David, absently making little cuts at the edge of the cheese with the knife. "In all other respects she is as sane as sane can be; there's not a woman of sounder sense, as to daily matters, anywhere. But this odd fancy has got hold of her mind; and it's just driving her crazy. She says that her husband appears to her in her dreams, and calls upon her to help and release him."

"Release him from what?—From his grave in Finchley Cemetery."

"From what indeed!" echoed David Skate. "That's what I ask her. But she persists that, sleeping or waking, his spirit is always hovering near her, crying out to her to avenge him. She declares that it is no fancy. Of course it is, though."

"I never met with such a case," said Tod, forgetting the good cider in his astonishment. "Frank Radcliffe died up at Dr. Dale's in

London. Stephen could not have had anything to do with his death : he was down here at the time.

"Well, Annet has got the notion firmly fixed in her mind that he had, and there's no turning her," said David. "There will be no turning her on this side the grave, unless we can get her freed from it. Any way, the fancy has come to such a pitch now and is telling upon her so seriously, that something must be done. If it were not that just the busiest time has set in ; the hay cut, and the wheat a'most ready to cut, I'd take her to London to Dr. Dale's. Perhaps if she heard the account of Frank's death from his own lips, and that it was a natural death, it might help her a bit."

We went home full of this. The Squire was in a fine way when he heard it, and brimming-over with pity for Annet. He had got to like her ; and he had always looked on Francis as in some degree belonging to him.

"Look here," said he, in his impulsive good nature, "it will never do to let this go on : we shall have her in a mad-house too. That's not a bad notion of David Skate's ; and if he can't leave to take her up to London just now, I'll take her."

"She could not go," said Tod. "She is in bed with low fever."

"Then I'll go up by myself," stamped the Squire in his zeal. "And get Dr. Dale to write out all the particulars, and hurry down again with them to her as fast as the train will bring me. Poor thing ! her disease must be a kind of mania."

"Now, Johnny, mind you don't make a mistake in the omnibus. Use your eyes ; they are younger than mine."

We were standing at Charing Cross in the hot afternoon sun, looking out for an omnibus that would take us westward. The Squire had lost no time in starting for London, and we had reached it an hour before. He let me come up with him, as Tod had gone to Whitney Hall.

"Here it is, sir. 'Kensington,—Hammersmith,—Richmond.' This is the right one."

The omnibus stopped, and in we got ; for the Squire said the sun was too fierce for the outside ; and by-and-by, when the houses became fewer, and the trees and fields thicker, we were set down near Dr. Dale's. A large house, standing amid a huge grass-plat, shut in by iron gates.

"I want to see Dr. Dale," said the Pater, bustling in as soon as the door was opened, without waiting to be asked.

The servant looked at him and then at me ; as if he thought the one or the other of us was a lunatic about to be left there. "This way, sir," said he to the Squire : and put us into a small square room that had a blue and drab carpet, and a stand of plants before the window. A

little man, with deep-set dark eyes, and the hair all gone from the top of his head, soon made his appearance—Dr. Dale.

The Squire plunged into explanations in his usual confusing fashion, mixing up many things together. Dr. Dale knitted his brow, trying to make sense of it.

"I'm sure I should be happy to oblige you in any way," said he—and he seemed to be a very pleasant man. * "But I do not quite understand what it is you ask of me."

"Such a dreadful thing, you know, if she has to be put in a mad-house too!" went on the Pater. "A pretty, anxious, hard-working little woman she is, as ever you saw, Dr. Dale! We think the account in your handwriting might ease her. I hope you'll not mind the trouble."

"The account of what?" asked the Doctor.

"Only this," explained the Squire, laying hold, in his zeal, of the Doctor's button-hole. "Just dot down the particulars of Francis Radcliffe's death. His death here, you know. I suppose you were an eye-witness to it."

"But, my good sir, I—pardon me,—I must repeat that I do not understand. Francis Radcliffe did not die here. He went away a twelvemonth ago, cured."

"Goodness bless me!" cried the Squire, staggering back to a chair when he had fully taken in the sense of the words, and staring about him like a real maniac. "It cannot be. I must have come to the wrong place."

"This is Dale House, and I am Dr. Dale. Mr. Francis Radcliffe was under my charge for some months: I can't tell exactly how many without referring to my books; seven or eight, I think; and he then left, cured, or nearly so."

"Johnny, hand me my handkerchief; it's in my hat. I can't make top or tail of this."

"I did not advise his removal," continued Dr. Dale, who, I do believe, thought the Squire was bad enough for a patient. "He was very nearly, if not quite well, but another month here would have contributed to establish his recovery on a sure basis. However, his brother insisted on removing him, and I had no power to prevent it."

"What brother?" cried the Squire, rubbing his head helplessly.

"Mr. Radcliffe, of Sandstone Torr."

"Johnny, I think we must all be dreaming. Radcliffe of the Torr got a letter from you one morning, Doctor—in June, I think; yes, I remember the hay-making was about—saying Francis had died; here in this house, with you: and bidding him come up to see you about it."

"I never wrote any such letter. Francis Radcliffe did not die here."

"Well, it was written for you by one of your people. Not die!

Why, you held a coroner's inquest on him ! You buried him in Finchley Cemetery."

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Todhetley. Francis Radcliffe was taken from this house, by his brother, last June, alive and well."

"Well I never !—this beats everything. Was he not worn away to a skeleton before he went ?—had he not heart disease ?—did he not die of effusion on the brain ?" ran on the Squire, in a maze of bewilderment.

"He was thin certainly : patients in asylums mostly are ; but he could not be called a skeleton. I never knew that he had heart disease. As to dying, he most assuredly did not die here."

"I do think I must be lost," cried the Squire. "I can't find any way out of this. Can you let me see Mr. Pitt, your head assistant, Doctor ? Perhaps he can throw some light on it. It was Pitt who wrote the letter to Mr. Radcliffe."

"You should see him with pleasure if he were still with me," replied the Doctor. "But he has left."

"And Frank did not die here !" commented the Squire. "What can be the meaning of it ?"

The meaning was evidently not to be found there. Dr. Dale said he could tell us no more than he had told, if he talked till night—that Francis Radcliffe was taken out by his brother. Stephen paid all charges at the time, and they went away together.

"And of course, Johnny, he is to be believed," quoth the Pater, turning himself round and round on the grass-plot as we were going away, like a tee-totum. "Dale would not deceive us : he could have no object in doing that. What in the world does it all mean ?—and where *is* Francis ? Ste Radcliffe can't have shipped him off to Canada with the wheelbarrows !"

How the Squire whirled straight off to the train, finding one on the point of starting, and got down home again, there's no space to tell of. It was between eight and nine, as the station clock told him, but he was in too much excitement to let the matter rest.

"Come along, Johnny. I'll have it out with Stephen before I sleep."

And they had it out in that same gloomy parlour at the Torr, where Todd and I had been a night or two before ; frightfully gloomy to-night, for the dusk was drawing on, and hardly a bit of light came in. The Squire and Stephen, sitting opposite each other, could not see the outline of one another's faces. Ste brazened it out.

"You be making a hullabaloo for nothing," said he, doggedly. "No, it's true he didn't die at the mad-house ; he died within a week of coming out of it. Why didn't I tell the truth about it ? Why, because I knew I should get a heap o' blame throwed back at me for taking him out—and I wished I hadn't took him out ; but 'twas no good wishing then."

How was I to know that the very self-same hour he'd got his liberty, he would begin drinking again?—and drink himself into a furious fever, and die of it? Could I bring him to life again, do you suppose?"

"What was the meaning of that letter you brought to me, purporting to come from Dr. Dale? Answer that, Stephen Radcliffe."

"I didn't bring you a letter from Dr. Dale. 'Twas from Pitt; Dr. Dale's head man. You read it yourself. When I found that Frank was getting unmanageable at the lodgings, I sent to Pitt, asking if he'd be good enough to come and see to him—I knew no other doctor up there; and Pitt was the best I could have, as he understood his case. Pitt came and took the charge; and I left Frank under him. I couldn't afford to stay up there, with my grass a-waiting to be cut, and all the fine weather a-wasting itself away. Pitt stayed with him; and he died in Pitt's arms; and it was Pitt that wrote the letter to tell me of it. You should ha' gone up with me, Squire," added Stephen, with a kind of sneer, "and then you'd have seen where he was for yourself, and knowed as much as I did."

"It was an infamous deceit to put upon me, Stephen Radcliffe."

"It did no harm. The deceit only lay in letting you think he died in the mad-house instead of out of it. If I'd not thought he was well enough to come out, I shouldn't have moved him. 'Twas his fault," sullenly added Stephen. "He prayed me to take him away from the place; not to go away without him."

"And where was it that he did die?"

"At my lodgings."

"What lodgings?"

"The lodgings I stayed at while I was shipping off the things to Tom. I took Frank there, intending to bring him down home with me when I came, and surprise you all. Before I could come he had got the drink into him, and was as mad again as a March hare. Pitt had to strap him down to his bed."

"Are you sure you did not ship him off to Tom also, while you were shipping the things?" demanded the Squire. "I believe you are crafty enough for it, Stephen Radcliffe,—and unbrotherly enough."

"If I'd shipped him off, he could have shipped himself back again, I take it," returned Stephen, coolly.

"Where are these lodgings that he died at?"

"In London."

"Whereabouts in London? I didn't suppose they were in New York."

"'Twas near Cow Cross."

"Cow Cross! Where in the name of wonder is Cow Cross?"

"It's towards Smithfield. Islington way."

"You give me the address, Stephen Radcliffe. I insist upon knowing it. Johnny, you can see—take it down. If I don't verify this matter

to my satisfaction, Mr. Radcliffe, I'll have you up publicly to answer for it."

Stephen took an old pocket-book out of his coat, went to the window to catch what little light came in, and ran his finger down the leaves.

"Gibraltar Terrace, Islington district," read he. "That was all the address I ever knew it by."

"Gibraltar Terrace, Islington district," repeated the Pater. "Take it down, Johnny—here's the back of an old letter. And now, Mr. Radcliffe, will you go with me to London?"

"No. I'll be hanged if I do."

"I mean to come to the top and bottom of this, I can tell you. You sha'n't play these tricks on honest people with impunity."

"Why, what do you suspect?" roared Stephen. "Do you think I murdered him?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you did," retorted the Pater. "Find out a man in one lie, and you may suspect him of others. What was the name of the people, at these lodgings?"

Stephen Radcliffe, sitting down again, put his hands on his knees, apparently considering; but I saw him take an outward glance at the Squire from underneath his grey eyebrows—very grey and bushy they were now. He could see that for once in his life the Pater was resolute.

"Her name was Mapping," he said. "A widow. Mrs. Mapping."

"Put that down, Johnny. 'Mrs. Mapping, Gibraltar Terrace, Islington district.' And now, Mr. Radcliffe, where is Pitt to be found?—He has left Dale House."

"In the moon, for aught I can tell," was the insolent answer. "I paid him for his attendance when we came back from the funeral—and precious high his charges were!—and I know nothing of him since."

We said good-night to Stephen Radcliffe with as much civility as could be called up under the circumstances, and went home in the fly. The next day we steamed up to London again to make enquiries at Gibraltar Terrace. It was not that the Squire exactly doubted Stephen's word, or for a moment thought that he had dealt unfairly by Frank: nothing of that: but he was in a state of explosive passion at the deceit Stephen Radcliffe had practised on him; and needed to throw the passion off. Don't we all know how unbearable inaction is in such a frame of mind?

Well. Up one street, down another, went we, in what Stephen had called the Islington district, but no Gibraltar Terrace could we see or hear of. The terrace might have been in Gibraltar itself, for all the sign there was of it.

"I'll go down to-morrow, and issue a warrant against Ste Radcliffe," cried the Squire, when we got in, tired and heated, to the Castle and

Falcon—at which inn, being convenient to the search, he had put up. “I will, Johnny, as I’m a living man. It is infamous to send us up here on a wild-goose chase, to a place that has no name, and no existence. I don’t like the aspect of things at all; and he shall be made explain them.”

“But, I suppose we have not looked in all parts of Islington,” I said. “It seems a large place. And—don’t you think, sir—that it might be as well to ascertain where Pitt is. I daresay Dr. Dale knows.”

“Perhaps it would, Johnny.”

“Pitt would be able to testify to the truth of what Stephen Radcliffe says. We might hear it all from him.”

“And need not bother further about this confounded Gibraltar Terrace. The thought did not strike me before, Johnny. We’ll go up to Dale’s the first thing after breakfast.”

The Squire chartered a cab: he was in too much of a fever to look out for an omnibus: and by ten o’clock Dr. Dale’s was reached. The Doctor was not at home, but we saw some one that the servant called Mr. Lichfield.

“Pitt?” said Mr. Lichfield—who was a tall, strong young man in a tweed suit of clothes, and had black hair parted down the middle—“Oh, he was my predecessor here. He has left.”

“Where’s he gone?” asked the Squire.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. Dr. Dale does not know; for I have once or twice heard him wonder what had become of Pitt. Pitt got rather irregular in his habits, I fancy, and the Doctor discharged him.”

“How long ago?”

“About a year, I think. I have not the least idea where Pitt is now: would be happy to tell you if I knew.”

So, there we were again—baffled. The Squire went back in the cab to the Castle and Falcon, rubbing his face furiously, and giving things in general a few hard words.

Up to Islington again, and searching up and down the streets and roads. A bright thought took the Pater. He got a policeman to show him to the district sorting-house, went in, and enquired whether such a place as Gibraltar Terrace existed, or whether it did not.

Yes. There was one. But it was not in Islington; only on the borders of it.

Away we went, after getting the right direction, and found it. A terrace of poor houses, in a quiet side street. In nearly every other window hung a card with “Lodgings” on it, or “Apartments.” Children played in the road: two men with a truck were crying mackerel.

“I say, Johnny, these houses all look alike. What is the number we want?”

“Stephen Radcliffe did not give any number.”

"Bless my heart ! We shall have to knock at every one of them."

And so he did. Every individual door he knocked at, one after the other, asking if Mrs. Mapping lived there. At the very last house of all we found her. A girl, whose clothes were dilapidated enough to have come down from Noah's Ark, got up from her knees, on which she was cleaning the flat door-flag, and told us to go into the parlour while she called Mrs. Mapping. It was a tidy threadbare room, not much bigger than a closet, with "Lodgings" wafered to the middle pane of the window.

Mrs. Mapping came in : a middle-aged, washed-out lady, with pink cheeks, and who looked as if she didn't have enough to eat. She thought we had come after the lodgings, and stood curtsying, and rubbing her hands down her black-silk apron—which was in slits. Apparently a "genteel" person who had seen better days. The Squire opened the ball, and her face took a puzzled look as she listened.

"Radcliffe?—Radcliffe?" No, she did not recollect any lodger of the name. But then, nine times out of ten, she did not know the names of her lodgers. She didn't want to know them. Why should she? If the gentlemen's names came out incidental, well and good; if not, she never presumed to enquire after them. She had not been obliged to let lodgings always.

"But this gentleman died here, *died*, ma'am," interrupted the Squire, pretty nearly beside himself with impatience. "It's about twelve months ago."

"Oh, that gentleman," she said. "Yes, he did die here, poor young man. The doctor—yes, his name was Pitt, sir—he couldn't save him. 'Twas drink that was the cause, I'm afeard."

The Squire groaned—wishing all drink was at the bottom of the Thames. "And he was buried in Finchley Cemetery, ma'am, we hear?"

"Finchley? Well, now yes, I believe it was Finchley, sir," replied Mrs. Mapping, considering—and I could see the woman was speaking the truth according to her recollection. "The burial fees are low at Finchley, sir."

"Then he did die here, ma'am—Mr. Francis Radcliffe?"

"Sure enough he did, sir. And a sad thing it was, one young like him. But whether his name was Radcliffe, or not, I couldn't take upon myself to say. I don't remember to have heard his name."

"Couldn't you have read it on the coffin-plate?" asked the Squire, explosively. "One might have thought if you heard it in no other way, you'd see it there."

"Well, sir, I was ill myself at the time, and in a good deal of trouble beside, and didn't get upstairs much out of my kitchen below. Like enough it was Radcliffe : I can't remember."

"His brother brought him—and lodged here with him—did he not?"

"Like enough, sir," she repeated. "There was two or three of 'em out and in often, I remember. Mr. Pitt, and others. I was that ill, myself, that some days I never got out of bed at all. I know it was a fine shock to me when my sister came down and said the young man was dead. She was seeing to things a bit for me during my illness. His rantings had been pitiful."

"Could I see your sister, ma'am?" asked the Squire.

"She's gone to Manchester, sir. Her husband has got a place there now."

"Don't you recollect the elder Mr. Radcliffe?" pursued the Squire. "The young man's brother? He was staying up in London two or three times about some shipping."

"I should if I saw him, sir, no doubt. Last year I had rare good luck with my rooms, never hardly had 'em empty. The young man who died had the first floor apartments.—Well, yes, I do remember now that some gentleman was here two or three times from the country. A farmer, I think he was. A middle-aged man, sir, so to say; fifty, or thereabouts; with grey hair."

"That's him," interrupted the Squire, forgetting his grammar in his haste. "Should know the description of him anywhere, shouldn't we, Johnny? Was he here at the time of the young man's death, ma'am?"

"No, sir. I remember as much as that. He had gone back to the country."

Mrs. Mapping stood, smoothing down the apron, waiting to hear what we wanted next, and perhaps not comprehending the drift of the visit yet.

"Where's that Mr. Pitt to be found?"

"Law, sir! as if I knew!" she exclaimed. "I've never set eyes on him since that time. He didn't live here, sir; only used to come in and out to see to the sick young man. I never heard where he did live."

There was nothing more to wait for. The Squire slipped half a crown into the woman's hand as we went out, and she curtsied again and thanked him—in spite of the better days. Another question occurred to him.

"I suppose the young man had everything done for him that could be? Care?—and nourishment?—and necessary attendance?"

"Surely, sir. Why not? Mr. Pitt took care of that, I suppose."

"Ay. Well, it was a grievous end. Good morning, ma'am."

"Good day to you, gentlemen."

The Squire went looming up the street in the dumps; his hands in his pockets, his steps slow.

"I suppose, Johnny, if one tried to get at Pitt in this vast London city, it would be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay."

"We have no clue to him, sir."

"No. And I don't know that it would answer any purpose if we did get at him. He could but confirm what we've heard. Well, this is fine news to take back to poor Annet Radcliffe!"

"I should think she had better not be told, sir."

"She must know it sometime."

The Squire sent for David Skate when we got home, and told him what we knew; and the two marched to the Torr in the blazing June sun, and held an interview with Stephen Radcliffe. Ste was sullen and reserved, and (for him) haughty. It was a mistake, of course, as things turned out, his having taken Frank from the asylum, he admitted that, admitted he was sorry for it, but he had done it for the best. Frank got drinking again, and it was too much for him; he died after a few days of delirium, and Pitt couldn't save him. That was the long and the short of the history; and the Squire and Skate might make the best and the worst of it.

The Squire and Skate were two of the simplest of men; honest-minded themselves, and unsuspicious of other people. They quitted the Torr for the blazing meadows, on their road home again.

"I shall not say anything about this to Annet," observed David Skate. "In her present frame of mind it would not do. The fever seems better, and she is up, and about her work again. Later perhaps we may tell her of it."

"I wish we could have found Pitt," said the Squire.

"Yes, it would be satisfactory to hear what he has to say," replied David. "Some of these days, when work is slack, I'll take a run up to London and try and search him out. Though I suppose he could not tell us much more than the landlady has told."

"There it is," cried the Squire. "Even Johnny Ludlow, with his crotchets about people and his likes and dislikes, says he's sure Mrs. Mapping might be trusted; that she was speaking to facts."

So matters subsided, and the weeks and our holidays went on together. Stephen Radcliffe, by this act of deceit, added another crooked feather to his cap of ills in the estimation of the neighbourhood; though that would not be likely to trouble him. Meeting Mr. Brandon one day in the road, just out of Church Dykely, Stephen chanced to say that he wished to goodness it was in his power to sell the Torr, so that he might be off to Canada to his son: *that* was the land to make money at, by all accounts.

"You and your son might cut off the entail, now poor Francis is gone," said old Brandon, thinking what a good riddance it would be if Stephen went.

"I don't know who'd buy it—at my price," growled Stephen. "I mean to get shut o' them birds, though," he added, as an afterthought. "*They* bain't entailed. They've never cried and shrieked as they do

this summer. I'd as soon have an army of squalling cats around the place."

"The noise is getting to be a subject of common talk," said old Brandon.

Ste Radcliffe bit his lips and turned his face another way, and emitted sundry daggers from his looks. "Let folks concern themselves with their own business," said he. "The birds is nothing to them."

Four weeks had gone by, and the moon was nearly at the full again. It's light streamed on the hedges, and flickered amid the waving trees, and lay on the fields like pale silver. It was Sunday evening, and we had run out for a stroll before supper, Tod and I.

On coming out of church, Duffham had chanced to get talking of the cries. He had heard them the previous night. They gave him the shivers, he said, they were so like human cries. This put it into our heads to go again ourselves, which we had not done since that first time. How curiously events are brought about!

Leaping the last style, the Torr was right before us at the opposite side of the large field, the tops of its chimneys and its towering sugar-loaf of a tower showing out white in the moonlight. The wind was high, blowing in gusts from the south-west.

"I say, Johnny, it's just the night for witches. Whirr! how it sweeps along! They'll ride swimmingly on their broomsticks."

"The wind must have got up suddenly," I answered. "There was none to-day. It was too hot for it. Talking of witches and broomsticks, Tod, have you read ——"

He put his arm across me to stop my words and steps, halting himself. We had been rushing on like six, had traversed half the field.

"What's that, Johnny?" he asked in a whisper. "There"—pointing onwards at right angles. "Something's lying there."

Something undoubtedly was—lying on the grass. Was it an animal?—or a man? It did not look much like either. We stood motionless, trying to make the shape out.

"Tod! It is a woman."

"Gently, lad! Don't be in a hurry. We'll soon see."

The figure raised itself as we approached, and stood confronting us. The last puff of wind that went brushing by might have brushed me down, in my surprise. It was Mrs. Francis Radcliffe.

She drew her grey cloak closer round her and put her hand upon Tod's arm. He went back half a step: I'm not sure but he thought it might be her ghost.

"Do not deem me quite out of my mind," she said—and her voice and manner were both collected. "I have come here every evening for nearly a week past to listen to the cries. They have never been so plain as they are to-night. I suppose the wind helps them."

The Cries in the Trees.

"But—you—were lying on the grass, Mrs. Francis," said Tod; not knowing yet what to make of it all.

"I had put my ear on the ground, wondering whether I might not hear it plainer," she replied. "Hark! Listen!"

The cry again! The same painful wailing sound that we heard that other night, making one think of I know not what woe and despair. When it had died away, she spoke further, her voice very low.

"People are talking so much about the cries that I strolled on here some evenings ago to hear them for myself. In my mind's tumult I can hardly rest quiet, once my day's work is done: what does it matter which way I stroll?—all ways are the same to me. Some people said the sounds came from the birds, some said from witches, some from the ghost of the man on the gibbet: but the very first night I came here I found out what they were really like—my husband's cries."

"What!" cried Tod.

"And I believe from my very soul that it is his spirit that cries!" she went on, her voice taking as much excitement as any voice, only half raised, can take. "His spirit is unable to rest. It is here, hovering about the Torr.—Hush! there it comes again."

It was anything but agreeable, I can assure you, to stand in that big white moonlight plain, listening to those mysterious cries and to these ghostly suggestions. Tod was listening with all his ears.

"They are the very cries he used to make in his illness at the farm," said Mrs. Radcliffe. "I can't forget *them*. I should know them anywhere. The same sound of voice, the same wail of anguish: I could almost fancy that I hear the words. Listen."

It did seem like it. One might have fancied that his name was repeated with a cry for help. "Help! Frank Radcliffe! Help!" But at such a moment as this, when the nerves are strung up to concert pitch, the imagination plays us all sorts of impossible tricks.

"I'll be shot if it's not like Frank Radcliffe's voice!" exclaimed Tod, breaking the silence. "And calling out, too."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Francis. "I shall not be able to bear this long: I shall have to speak of it to the world. When I say that you have recognised his voice also, they will be less likely to mock at me as a lunatic. David did, when I told him. At least, I could make no manner of impression on him."

Tod was lying down with his ear to the ground. But he soon got up, saying he could not hear so well.

"Did Stephen kill him, do you think?" she asked, in a dread whisper, drawing closer to us. "Why, else, should his poor unquiet spirit haunt the region of the Torr?"

"It is the first time I ever heard of spirits calling out in a human voice," said Tod. "The popular belief is, that they mostly appear in dumb show."

He quitted us, as he spoke, and went about the field with slow steps, halting often to look and listen. The trees around the Torr in particular seemed to attract his attention, by the length of time he stared up at them. Or, perhaps, it might be at the tops of the chimneys: or perhaps at the tapering tower. We waited in nearly the same spot, shivering and listening. But the sounds never came so distinctly again: I think the wind had spent itself.

"It is a dreadful weight to have to carry about with me," said poor Annet Radcliffe as we walked homewards. "And oh! what will be the ending? Will it be heard always?"

I had never seen Tod so thoughtful as he was that night. At supper he put down his knife and fork perpetually to fall into a brown study; and I am sure he never knew a word of the reading afterwards.

It was some time in the night, and I was fast asleep and dreaming of daws and magpies, when something shook my shoulder and awoke me. There stood Tod, his nightshirt white as snow in the moonlight.

"Johnny," said he, "I have been trying to get daylight out of that mystery, and I think I've done it."

"What mystery? What's the matter?"

"The mystery of the cries. They don't come from Francis Radcliffe's ghost but from Francis himself. His ghost! When that poor soft creature was talking of the ghost, I should have split with laughter but for her distress."

"From Francis himself! What on earth do you mean?"

"Stephen has got him shut up in that tower."

"Alive?"

"Alive! Go along, Johnny! You don't suppose he'd keep him there if he were dead. Those cries we heard to-night were human cries; words; and that was a human voice uttering them, as my ears and senses told me; and my brain has been in a muddle ever since, all sleep gone clean out of it. Just now, turning and twisting possibilities about, the solution of the mystery flashed over me like a gleam of lightning. Ste has got Frank shut up in the Torr.

He, standing there upright by the bed, and I, digging my elbow into the counterpane and resting my cheek on my hand, gazed at one another, the perplexity of our faces showing out strongly in the moonlight.

And I am just as sorry as you can be that the ending cannot be got in, for I as good as promised to finish it. But the magazine will not give me more space, you see, and it must wait until next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE RHINE!

THE glorious Rhine!

I stood and let its wavelets kiss my feet :
 Rippling, and bright, and cool, and oh, so sweet ;
 What happiness was mine !
 To stand and gaze in rapture through the day,
 To cast all other thoughts and dreams away,
 Save this alone—the Rhine !

A strange, deep thrill
 Of bliss I felt, and wonder at His love,
 Who made the world so fair, and from above
 Looks down in blessing still.
 My heart, and mind, and soul to Him were bow'd
 In gratitude, as on the river flow'd,
 Obedient to His will.

The corn-fields sweet
 Fill all the air with tender, rustling sound,
 Intoxicating fragrance breathes around,
 The happy sense to greet ;
 While dotted here and there in rich outspread,
 The scarlet poppy rears its sun-born head :
 Truly an off'ring meet.

And large-leaved vine,
 Now trailing close to earth in modesty,
 Now growing upwards, upwards to the sky,
 Its fruitful branches twine.
 And honest, sun-burned labourers of the soil,
 Beneath its welcome shade rest from their toil
 In dreams of corn and wine.

From lofty throne
 Looks down in haughty pride the castl'd peak
 Of Drachenfels, as if it fain would speak
 Of wondrous exploits done.
 Deep-hidden in its mighty, rocky breast,
 The sweet-voiced echo dwells, though now at rest
 Its music-ringing tone.

Onward I went,
 At every step new beauties met my gaze ;
 O'erwhelmed, at length, I saw as through a maze
 Of glad bewilderment ;
 Through groves of apricot and orange trees,
 Laden with fruit and blossom, on the breeze,
 Mingling in gracious scent.

How are they blest
 Who live to call this Rhineland home !
 I pray no strife or turmoil near may come
 To break its peaceful rest !
 While from afar, in mem'ry's faithful fold,
 I worship still, till I again behold,
 Rhine's sunny, gleaming breast !

WAITING FOR THE CARS.

BY AN AMERICAN LADY.

SUDDENLY the conductor enters, and in a stern voice exclaims, "Passengers for 'so and so' will change cars here." "Why, where are we?" says one. "What for?" cry a dozen. But no answer comes, and no time is given to put on overcoats, or cloaks, or shoes. We are landed in the mud, in the dusk of the evening; the train whizzes past, and we are left.

About twenty persons had alighted, and there we stood, holding what little personal property we had, the rain pouring down upon us, and looking out in the darkness for the cars we were to change into. But we could see no cars: none were there: what was to become of us on that miserable night. Presently a voice of authority was heard.

"If the passengers will walk into the *depôt* they will be more comfortable. The next train will not be along for an hour yet." Sure enough, there was a station-house behind us, consisting of one room. Gladly we entered the little building, and for once forgot to laugh at the darkly painted little zigzag-corniced *depôt*, all finished off so nicely on the outside, as they all are, and so devoid of all comfort within.

Our company nearly filled the room; and, strangers as we all were to each other, we were a very silent company for some time. Indeed, we had not yet recovered from our surprise.

Two or three young mothers with children, four gentlemen with their wives, one old lady with two tall sons, or, I would say, two tall sons with their mother, three or four "lone, lorn women," who might be maids, wives, or widows, one unmistakable old maid, and the others lone men, who looked disconsolate enough to be old bachelors. This was our company. The room was so dimly lighted that we looked like spectres standing grim and speechless, only waiting for the cock to crow to set us free. The stove smoked; and no wonder, stuffed as it was with wet wood. The rain came down in a torrent, and we began to fear that all the bridges would be swept away; and still the train never came. We were tolerably patient until the hour had passed: then we became restless. Children cried for something to eat; and, indeed, a good warm supper would have been very acceptable to all.

Another hour passed; no train, no supper, and seemingly not much hope of either. And still another hour, but no train!

This hour seemed very long indeed; longer than all; but the children had cried themselves to sleep—that was some comfort. The women sat patiently on the hard benches, and gave up every superfluous cloak and shawl to make beds for the babies. The men paced the wet floor,

tried to stir up the wet wood, read all the advertisements on the walls, leaned their faces close against the dirty windows, and looked out into the darkness.

If anyone chanced to move suddenly, or seemed to listen, in an instant all were listening intently for the train. The ticket agent nodded on his perch, and no one else belonging to the *dépôt* was visible. The one lamp grew very dim, and finally went out; we waked up the nodding man, and asked for oil to fill it. "There was none," he answered; "expected some by the next train," and he slept again.

The stove-door was opened, and the now blazing wood threw a dim light over the room. The wind howled dismally, and at times came rushing over the open prairie in sudden gusts, threatening to tear the roof from our little *dépôt*, fancy cornice and all. We only shuddered, and drew as close as possible to the stove. Still no signs of the train.

The wood at last burned out, and there was no more to be had; at least, the man said so, and we knew not where to find it. Again we were about to be left in darkness, when one of the ladies opened her carpet-bag and produced a long wax candle. Here was a treasure indeed! You may laugh, but it truly seemed so. We inquired how she chanced to have it. "I never travel without matches, candle, soap, and towels; they are often needed, and not always to be had," was her answer. We blessed her for her thoughtfulness, and resolved to provide ourselves with a supply at the first town we came to, should we ever be so fortunate as to leave our present quarters.

The lady began talking in a low tone to some of those near her, telling how she came to dread being left without a light. As she was the only one speaking at the time, low though her voice was, we began to listen attentively: gradually her words became louder; quite distinct. What she said was very interesting, and for the next half hour we forgot to listen for the train. The story can never interest others as it did us at that time, but I will try to tell it as correctly as I can.

"When I was a very little girl, not eight years old," she said, "my father went to live in Indiana. A sudden loss of fortune overwhelmed him, and he took the wild step of removing to a farm in the backwoods. The farm was in the very midst of those thick, dark woods, about five miles from the town of 'Harrison,' then a small village. There was not a human habitation within a mile of the house, and but very few within three miles. People here on the prairies talk of the 'heavy timber' on the river bottoms; why, it would not be considered anything more than a hazel thicket by the side of the deep, dark, dense forests of Indiana. To live in the country, is to live in 'the woods,' and 'tis wonderful how people ever find their way out when once they get fairly into them.

"How my father came to select this spot for his home we could never tell; he was quite unused to a country life, having always lived in town. Our mother had died six months before. He went, and took his three girls, two of them growing-up, and I a little one, to the then far west, and fixed his abode in that rough, solitary log-house. He wished for solitude, he said to his remonstrating friends; but he forgot that his daughters, accomplished young ladies and delicately nurtured, must be solitary too. They were startled at the change; I, child-like, enjoyed it.

"How happy I was the first day of our arrival at the new home! I could not think why my sisters cried when papa was not present, and why they tried to conceal their red and swollen eyes from him. I was delighted; the wide fire-place was so queer, and the stick chimney charming. I could romp as much as I pleased, and as my best dresses were not put on now, I had no fear of spoiling my clothes. I lived out of doors most of the day, and at night was sound asleep as soon as I had had my supper. What if the house was small and poorly furnished? it seemed all pleasant fun to me.

But my sisters mourned over the great change; not a day passed that they did not shed bitter tears at their sad fate. It was rather hard for young, accomplished girls of eighteen and twenty, to be taken from society, and be buried in the woods. Buried there without companions or interests of any kind, save only their almost worshipped father, for never did children love a parent more than we did this our only one, and he tried to fill the place of both father and mother to his three helpless girls. Yes, helpless enough; for I believe, young as I was, I knew about as much of housekeeping as my sisters did when we went there, and we had no help of any kind. Servants would not follow us to the backwoods.

"Papa went to work on the farm with a will, but he knew as little about it as my sisters did of housekeeping. When at work near the house I was with him; and if he went only one field distant we watched him constantly, distressed if he passed for a moment out of sight. It was so lonely! He would come in at sundown, tired with his new labour; I would climb his knee, kiss his blistered hands, and beg him to let me go with him the next day when he went to put up the fence or to burn brush. He would smooth my tangled and neglected hair, call me his little tomboy, and promised to buy me a pony when his 'store-ship' came in from over the sea.'

"There was one family living about two miles distant, their name Ramay. They had called on my sisters, and seemed inclined to be neighbourly. Mr. Ramay had sent his boys over to help my father for one week; and Mrs. Ramay invited my sisters to come and see her daughters: two smart, good-looking girls. The invitation was not accepted: but we had gone over to the Ramays' once or twice to hear

the preacher on Sunday. He only came to the neighbourhood once a month, and the service was held at Mr. Ramay's. Their house, rough though it was, was far better than ours. It was what is called a double house, quite spacious.

"I had spent the night there the last time, as it rained so fast, and Mrs. Ramay kept me. I was particularly delighted with the loft where I slept, because I could lie in bed and look at the stars through the open logs. Of course my sisters held their heads at first far above the Ramay girls: but there's nothing like the backwoods for bringing people to a level.

"The paths through the woods were very indistinct, as it was not more than once or twice a week that anyone passed from one house to another. So, lest the way should be lost altogether, chips were cut from the trees on either side at regular distances; these marks are called 'blazes.' My father, being told at first to follow the blazes, and then there could be no danger of losing his way, he, not knowing the meaning of the word, had concluded that it must mean trees that had once blazed. He followed the path as far as he could trace it, and then looked out for trees that were blackened by fire; and as these were far apart, and not by any means in a straight line, he lost his way entirely, and didn't find a cabin, where he could inquire the way, until he had walked full six miles in place of the three he had expected to travel. After that, he never attempted to go a mile without a compass in his pocket.

"We knew the way to the Ramays', however, and my sisters had, one Sunday, walked there alone. They were a little nervous, and expected some wild beast to spring out from every stump, for we had heard wonderful stories of wolves and panthers. We often heard the wolves howling at night, but had never caught sight of one. Bessie and Bella shivered at the howl of a wolf, and would draw close to papa in the room, of an evening, when it was heard. He only laughed at their fears, telling them to throw open the door and let the beasts see the light, and they would not come nearer; as all wild beasts dislike fire. For my part, I rather enjoyed their howling. It gave us something new to talk of, and what could harm me when papa was near?

"You will think I am never coming to my story; but you shall have it yet, if the cars don't come. I love to recall those early days, and linger over the strange scenes. It seems like a dream now; for we remained but a short time there, so that we did not grow accustomed to the strange life. We were but introduced to it and then left it for ever.

"One morning our father told us at breakfast that he would have to go to Harrison that day, to purchase some farming utensils, and that he would be home by three o'clock in the afternoon. It was so seldom he left us that we made as much fuss as if he had been going on a long journey; for how could we pass the long day, and know that papa was not near us? What might not happen to him or to us? I sobbed

violently as he bade me good-bye ; and, to dry my tears, he told me that if I learned a good long lesson to recite to him in the evening, he would bring me a pair of gold earrings. My sisters looked sad as they handed him hat, cane, and *compass*, and we all stood in the doorway watching him, until he entered the thick, dark woods, and we could see him no longer.

"Bessie and Bella busied themselves clearing away the breakfast things, chatting pleasantly together. They seemed to forget me ; and I slipped away, lest they should set me to the lesson—and I wanted to play first. So I and my dog ran off to a favourite stump near the front fence, to finish a playhouse I had been decorating for some days with broken china, moss, acorn cups, and various other ornaments.

"Pingo, my dog, was no beauty, but I loved him dearly, and he was my constant companion—my friend, playmate, and confidant. He was a long, lean, brindle cur, something between a mastiff and hound, faithful, watchful, and thankful for the attention I showed him. He always shared in my playhouse suppers, sitting demurely on one side of the log, our table ; sometimes my pinafore was tied about his neck, and sometimes spread over our rough table. He expected every other mouthful, and always got it, and at the close of our meal he cleared the table by devouring all that remained of the precious scraps I had brought from the house. Strange how much that kind of dog can eat ; nothing comes amiss to them, and they never seem to have enough. Many a long story did Pingo silently listen to of the good times I used to have in the old home ; of the pretty dresses and hats I wore ; of the beautiful carriage I used to ride in with mamma, of the large, fine shops, and of the pretty little white dog I had owned. But I always ended by telling him that I never had such a good, big, nice dog as the one I had now in the woods—my Pingo. Then he would shake his great long head knowingly, and springing up suddenly, perhaps upset my china, and run barking into the bushes after imaginary squirrels, just to show me he could talk as well as I."

Here the lady paused ; and, with a smile, asked if we were not weary of this childish story. "No, no ; go on, please ;" "We are thankful to listen ;" "We can almost imagine ourselves in the *woods*, in place of being becalmed on a prairie," was heard from all sides. One man did get up, opened the door, and looked out. Some one asked what he was looking for. "The cars," said he, quite seriously, and all of us laughed. A gentleman politely remarked that he had quite forgotten what we were waiting for, and he only hoped the train would *not* come to interrupt our story.

"I can end it in five minutes," said the lady ; "I had no idea of telling a story when I began, but merely a simple incident. It has spun itself out, and I think have felt as much interested in it as anyone present." And she resumed her narrative.

"My playhouse was all arranged to my mind, and I had tied my long-sleeved pinafore round Pingo's neck, put his black paws carefully through the sleeves, and told him to make believe he was a lady, and I was another lady coming to call upon him, when he set up a loud bark, upset my shelf of dishes, and, springing to the fence, placed his front feet on the upper rail with his long nose pointed towards the woods. I fairly screamed with laughter at the comical figure he cut, for the pinafore was put on like a coat, the band just fitting round his neck, and the long strings brought round and tied in a knot on his back, his tail lifted the skirt slightly, as you have seen monkeys' coat-skirts looped up, and with those huge paws sticking out of the sleeves—what a picture he made!

"My sisters came out at the unusual noise to enquire the cause; to see what it was. The louder I laughed, the louder Pingo barked, and they laughed too when they caught sight of Pingo in his fancy dressing-gown. Just then there appeared on the path, leading out of the woods, two girls on horseback, coming like the wind, as if riding a race. Before we could speak, they sprang from their horses, and standing on the high fence begged us to call in our dog, if *that was* a dog that stood barking at them so furiously. At the sound of their voices, Pingo, finding he had no enemies to contend with, sneaked off to a corner of the fence, and began gnawing at his dress, feeling quite unfit to receive visitors in that plight.

"It was the two Miss Ramays; they had ridden over in great haste, just as they had been at their work, with homespun cotton frocks, blue-sun-bonnets, and rosy cheeks. They came to invite my sisters to a quilting that afternoon; they expected several friends, young men and young women, would gather at it.

"Now, Bessie and Bella had been shut up in the woods for months; they had never met with any of the young people, and never been to any kind of party. Glad enough were they to hear of anything that was likely to have any fun in it; but their father was gone out: what answer could they give? The lively girls would hear of no denial, but insisted on my sisters coming early, and staying all night. 'Better bring Kate with you,' said they, as one of them pulled my curls as she passed me, and the other tried to stroke my face the wrong way; and springing on their long-limbed colts, they started on the full run for home, to resume their preparations for the evening. Such looking 'colts,' as they called them, were seldom seen with ladies on their backs: but many a city lady would give something to sit a horse as those girls did. They offered to send the horses over, if my sisters would like to ride. But the offer was declined. Bessie and Bella had never been on horseback except in a riding-school; and this kind of rough riding was very different from that they had been taught.

"They ran back into the house. I called Pingo, to take off the

pinafore, and found but little of it remaining : he had torn it woefully. Expecting to be scolded, I went dejectedly in ; but found Bessie and Bella in the best and easiest of humours. That quilting-party was something to look forward to, and they were marvelling what in the world it would be like. I said, when they asked me, that I would not go : I preferred to stay at home for papa, and put in my new earrings. That pleased them : I suppose they did not want the trouble of me : and they began to look over ribbons and laces and party attire. Then all at once thinking how ridiculous such things would appear in a cabin in the backwoods, they laughed, put them away, and said they would go in their plain dresses.

“ ‘I do wonder if there will be anything like dress, though?’ cried Bessie. ‘Look here, Bella, if —’

“ ‘But what if papa does not come back in time?’ I asked.

“ ‘Oh, you hush,’ said they, both at once. ‘Sit down, Katy, and eat your pie.’

“We had no regular dinner cooked that day ; and, as it was quite warm, the fire got neglected ; before three o'clock it was quite out, as one of my sisters found, to her great annoyance, when she wished to heat an iron to smooth out some ribbon that had been long folded. Now matches were not known in the West at that time, and the tinder-box was in common use. But my sisters were careless young housekeepers ; no tinder was prepared, and the flint was lost. Papa had promised to bring a new one from Harrison. The fire had never been let go out before. It all came of the expected quilting.

“Three o'clock, and no signs of papa. My sisters were uneasy, ready and waiting to start ; and they sent me out to the fence to look for him. I did look, and look, until my eyes ached. Pingo knew something was wrong, and went snuffing about in every bush, and at last caught a poor little rabbit, and laid it half dead at my feet. I had only wanted an excuse to cry, and now I fairly sobbed over the wounded rabbit ; its large mournful eyes were wide open, and its poor little quivering mouth was pitiful. Pingo was quite ashamed of his work, and came and licked my hands ; but I drove him away, and told him I would never, never like him again, which sent him off sorrowful and repentant. I was sorry enough for every cross word I had said to him before that night was over.

“Getting down from the fence, I was sitting on the ground with my apron over my face, and the little dying rabbit in my lap. My sisters came to the door and called, but I would not answer. Coming out, they took the rabbit softly away—it was dead now—and they led me into the house, and spoke so kindly to me that I cried harder than ever. Then they began to pet and coax me, and, child though I was, I knew they had some object in doing so, for they generally laughed at my childish griefs.

" 'Katy,' said Bella, 'do you mind our starting now? Papa will soon be here; we shall be sure to meet him, and we will tell him to hasten.'

" 'Of course, Katy won't mind it; she's such a brave little girl,' put in Bessie. 'I am going to give her a lot of pretty things to play with.'

" 'You must give them to me to *keep*,' said I, remembering how they had often served me; 'and if you meet papa, you must not look at my new earrings; I want to see them first.' So the bargain was made, and any quantity of old ribbons, pieces of bright silks, some prints, and an old bead bag, were given to me to keep.

" With all my treasures spread out on the bed, they were welcome to go, for me. They kissed me kindly as they said good-bye. Calling in Pingo, they told me to stay in the house till papa came; and, closing the door as they went out, they left me. I listened for a moment, but could not hear their footsteps on the soft grass, so I made Pingo jump on the bed beside me, and was soon interested in looking over my pretty things. Many, many years have passed since that day, and yet I can remember every piece of ribbon, every piece of silk, and the figures of every one of the prints, as they lay, spread out on that bed: which was papa's. The beads delighted me, and I began to rip them from the bag, and wondered how many *strings* of beads I could make from it. Pingo was pleased with his soft bed, and lay stretched at full length, while I tried the effect of my ribbons and laces by spreading them over him, tying up his ears, and putting bracelets on his paws. He would sometimes open his eyes and peep at me through lace spectacles, looking so funny that I laughed heartily. I did not feel lonely or even think of being afraid; and many odd fancies and pleasant thoughts came into my mind that afternoon.

" At last the sun went down, and the room became rather dark, so I left the bed; and opening the door, sat down with my dog on the doorstep. The day had been warm; but the evening was quite chilly, and as I looked at the wide fireplace I wished for the means to kindle a fire. I even stirred up the ashes to see if there was any heat in them; but no, they were quite cold. Then, for the first time since my sisters left me, I began to feel lonely, and to wonder why my father did not come. As I sat cowering over the cold ashes, Pingo came to my side; and, standing on his hind feet, looked up the broad chimney, and set up a loud barking. I stood on the back log and looked up to see what he was barking at; and there, on the sticks of which the chimney was built, sat some little birds, quietly roosting for the night. 'Now,' thought I, 'it must be late, for the birds have gone to bed. Pingo wants his supper. Oh, why does not papa come?' I left the house and went out to the fence; but somehow I did not like to look at that path leading off into the woods, for all my friends had left me by that very

path : so I went back, Pingo close at my heels ; he seemed to know he was my only protection now, poor fellow, and kept close by me. A bright thought entered my head, I would put the table ready for papa's supper, and get him the best supper I could without fire. So I drew out the heavy table from the wall, pulled it about until it would stand steady on that uneven floor, as I had often seen my sisters do ; and I felt as important as any young housekeeper could ; talked to Pingo ; and boxed his ears for pulling the table-cloth half off with his paws in his efforts to assist me, and told him of the nice supper he should have when papa came home. He only answered by barking up the chimney at the winking birds.

"When I had placed the forks and spoons and what eatables I could find on the table, I bethought me all at once of a jar of precious quince preserves. Bessie was very choice with them ; I had never tasted them but once, and that was when a stranger had chanced to stay to supper. They were on the highest shelf of a tall cupboard made of rough boards, and not fastened in any way to the wall. This cupboard had no doors, only sides and back and shelves ; and to reach the top shelf I began to climb the shelves, silly child that I was ! Down came cupboard and child and all.

"Such screams, I think, never came from one cabin containing only a child and a dog. How I escaped being killed was a miracle ; the cupboard was very rough and heavy, and I was under it, or partly so ; but I managed to crawl out with my face and hands cut and bleeding. Broken glass and china covered the floor, and my hair was well soaked with quince jam. Poor Pingo had his share of bruises too ; his foot was bleeding, and a piece of glass stuck in his side. He yelled, and so did I. A pan of milk was emptied all over me ; and, shaking with cold and fright, I rushed out of the house, Pingo after me, into the dusky twilight, screaming and sobbing. 'Oh papa, papa ! Oh Bessie and Bella !'

"The dark woods gave back no answer ; but the whippoorwill's mourning cry and the hooting of an owl startled me and drove me back again. What a wreck it was ! Broken glass and china and crockery-ware, mingling with smashed pies, preserves, milk, and cake !

What would papa say to it ?—would he be very angry with me ? I did not care if my sisters were angry ; for I was beginning to feel that they had treated me cruelly by leaving me. Then I cried over my cut hands and bleeding face. I washed poor Pingo's foot, and he whined pitifully : but I forgot to wash my own bleeding face. I was wet and cold, and must have been hungry too ; but I did not think of eating.

"Once more I called to my father, and then burst out crying again. Pingo barking louder than ever, and between us we did make 'night hideous.' At last it was so to us, as we sat howling together on the door-step. Owls hooted, whippoorwills joined in the chorus, bats

fanned our faces, and the darkness increased; still we sat on, on the cold stone step. Pingo was the first to move; he would go in as far as the wreck and smash, then limp back, touch my poor bleeding face, and again go in. Soon another howl was heard at a distance, and every hair on the dog's back stood up like bristles. I knew it was the howl of a wolf, and I followed Pingo in, but did not close the door. I was afraid indoors, afraid out of doors. Only once more I went to look out, but the path could not be seen now, not even the fence, for it was quite dark. I thought what if that wolf meets my father in the dark woods and eats him up! 'Oh, he will never, never come,' I moaned, and threw myself down on the stone hearth with my arms round Pingo's neck. But the dog was restless, and kept walking to the door and back again, uttering low growls. He wanted me to shut the door, but I did not understand him. The darkness troubled and frightened me greatly: my father had often said that light would keep off wild beasts. Oh for a light, for just one spark of fire!—and yet I dared not shut the door. I sat down on the back log, and tried to see the little birds on the chimney rafters, but I could only hear their low twittering; that was some company for me. I could no longer see my dog: he must have been guarding the door: but he came to me at last, and curled down in the ashes beside me; and I drew his head in my lap, and my tears bathed his face as well as my own. I cannot tell how long we sat there, but it seemed an age to me. I cried for a light, I begged my father to come and bring a light; and I prayed in my childish way for a light and for a fire. And from that day to this I cannot bear darkness, and always carry matches and candles with me wherever I go."

We could readily believe it.

"Surely," she continued, "no night was ever *so dark* as that one. When the howl of the wolf sounded nearer, I could feel the coarse hair on Pingo's back rise up under my hand; he would stand up close to me and growl savagely, but he never left my side after I slipped from the back log and sat down with him in the ashes. I never thought of going to bed, not even of lying down on the one in the room, papa's; I was too terrified to stir. I was constantly listening for my father, and I heard every sound distinctly, the birds in the chimney, the crickets in the wall, and those dreadful beasts. No prisoner in his dungeon ever longed for light as I did then. I did not reflect that this darkness could not last, that daylight would supersede it; darkness had come *for good*, as children say. Oh, that dismal darkness!—was it dark everywhere? Were all my friends dead, and in the dark? I crouched closer to my dog, and asked him if he could see *me*."

"Once when a sort of crackling sound was heard, as of feet stepping amongst dry brush, I tried to get up, for I thought it was my father; but Pingo was on his feet instantly, and stood directly across me, so that I could not move. He did not bark—only gave a low growl, and

stood thus, holding me down till the sound ceased. I did not fear the wolves now; I did just once think they might hurt Pingo; but I cared for nothing but the darkness: it was that that frightened me. When Pingo lay down again I put my head on his, and lay there sobbing and shivering; and at last I fell asleep. And in this position I was found by my father about seven o'clock the next morning. What was his astonishment, as he entered the open door, to find me, his youngest child, lying in the ashes, with only the dog in the house. He saw the overturned cupboard, the broken glass and dishes, the general disorder of the room, and my blood-stained dress and face. What had happened? were my sisters murdered? These were the questions he asked. But I could only cling to him and say in my bewildering joy at seeing him, 'Oh, papa, you did come and bring a light: I thought you would!' and it seemed that I should never let him go again. He feared I had lost my senses; and I had, in a measure, for every nerve was quivering.

"He made a fire, warmed some water, and washing my much-soiled hands, face, and head, put a clean frock on me, and laid me on his bed. I soon slept soundly, with my hands in his. He had been delayed at Harrison. It was quite late when he started, and his compass being of no use in the dark, he, as usual, lost his way. After walking miles and miles, he at last gave it up and sat down under a tree to wait for daylight. He thought how frightened we should all be, left alone in the night; but he never dreamed of the poor forsaken child cowering in the chimney corner with only the faithful dog for her protector.

"My sisters returned, and sobbed over me for half the day, and papa would not reproach them when he saw how much they reproached themselves. They never thought but that he would have been back home before evening.

"When the story of my lonely night got abroad, I seemed to be quite a curiosity. On Sunday, after the service was over at Mrs. Ramay's, the people gathered round me, asking all kinds of questions, and marvelling that the wolves and panthers had not run away with me. 'Guess they would if they'd not smelt the dog,' said an old farmer."

"And, ma'am, how long did you young ladies have to stay in the backwoods?" asked a listener.

"A very short while after that," she answered. "My father saw the mistake he had made in taking us to them. He was tired also of his experiment; and we all went back to our civilized home."

At this moment, when the words were yet upon her lips, the door of the dépôt was flung open; a young man put his head in, all hasty excitement, and we heard simultaneously a sound not to be mistaken.

"The cars!" he cried. "Ladies and gentlemen, here come the cars."

MADAME LAROCHE.

"THERE he goes again!" thought old Madame Laroche, gazing fretfully after her handsome young nephew as he crossed the porch of the pretty rose-embowered cottage opposite her own imposing residence. "What evil genius brought that Louise Deville to her sister's just at the time that Maurice came here, nobody knows, unless indeed it was Madame Deville herself. I daresay she thought Maurice would be a fine catch for her husband's poor sister.—Ha, not at home, eh! Gone up to the Hill, of course," her thoughts went on, as the young man turned from the door and hastily made his way to the street again. "And there he goes after her! I verily believe the minx steals off to that hill just to entice him. Well, well, Mademoiselle Louise, we'll be even yet! It's a long lane that has no turning."

Madame's eyes dropped abstractedly to the floor as her offending nephew vanished around the corner. Minute after minute she sat there, an expression on her face never found on that of a good woman. At length she arose with a satisfied smile, and, despite her sixty odd years, quickly ascended the stairs to a back chamber whose windows overlooked a fine expanse of country.

"Yes, yes, well enough to see what they are about up there," she muttered, taking a small spy-glass from the closet and adjusting it with a vicious jerk. "Humph, just got there! shaking down the scarlet maple leaves to announce himself. Well, she does look pretty, certainly, under the purple sunset glow and that flame-like shower. But riches should mate with riches, and she's as poor as a church mouse."

Long and patiently madame watched the two, and when they finally left the shadow of the old maple she put away the glass with a few quick nods that betokened no good to Louise Deville.

A little later she was making a careful tour of her beautiful front grounds. In due time her patience was rewarded. The two for whom she watched came slowly down the street. The suave old lady courteously greeting Mademoiselle Deville was quite another woman from the patient spy of the previous hour.

"I pray you to come in, my dear," she cried, throwing open the gate and kissing Louise on both cheeks. "While Maurice goes to the post-office for me I will show you how defiant my summer flowers have been of the great winds."

Maurice looked surprised.

"How is it that Joseph did not go?" he asked. "Is he ill?"

"No; but he seemed so tired that I forbade his stirring, knowing that I could send you."

"My aunt Laroche has suddenly become very considerate," thought Maurice, as he excused himself to Louise, and hurried away. "Joseph was all right two hours ago."

It was but a stone's throw to the post-office, and madame took advantage of Louise's first remark as they turned from the gate.

"Yes, my dear," she answered brightly, "it is a charming place, and I am proud of it. But I assure you I shall be doubly so when Maurice's lovely bride is installed here as mistress. She is a magnificent creature, Louise, and, Maurice says, the loveliest on the face of the earth—or has he made you the confidant of his rapturous admiration of Marie?"

"No, madame," answered Louise, a little faintly, as she bent over the fragrant bloom of a jasmine.

"He has not? Well, I am surprised, I admit. But dear me, how ghastly pale you are!" she abruptly cried as Louise reluctantly turned without a thought beyond the delight of the moment. But here he is, and furious he'd be if he knew I'd been telling tales. So you must—" it is very injurious to persons of your fine organization. Here, my dear, let me give you a bit of the more delicate mignonette."

And madame stooped and culled with elaborate care a few sprigs, resuming, as she placed them in Louise's hand—

"I was about to say that I often tell Maurice he should, under the circumstances, be more careful in his deportment towards the ladies. But, dear fellow, he whispers soft nothings and looks unutterable things without a thought beyond the delight of the moment. But here he is, and furious he'd be if he knew I'd been telling tales. So you must—"

"Telling tales," laughingly echoed Maurice Arnot as he joined them. "If they are pleasant ones, I'd like to be a listener, too, Aunt Laroche. Did you find them entertaining, Mademoiselle Deville?" he asked, his love-soft eyes trying to scan her face in the deepening twilight.

"Undoubtedly," she answered, lightly and pleasantly, "since Madame Laroche was the narrator."

"Thank you, my dear," bowed madame, sweetly, and then, more to change the subject than anything else, she said, turning to Maurice, "I see you have letters. Are there any for me?"

"Three for you, as many for me, and one for Mademoiselle Deville."

"We will go into the house, then," returned madame. "I shall not depend upon your eyesight in this failing light."

Once in the house, Louise gracefully yielded to Madame's pressing invitation and remained. And so finely did she deport herself, that before the evening was half over, madame was querying within her own bosom whether, after all, the lips and cheeks had not whitened under the jasmine's perfume.

"But it doesn't matter," she thought, as at a later hour Louise bade her a gay good-night, "Maurice is safe. She's sure to give him the cold shoulder, let him make love ever so finely. I must, however, send her a little note to-morrow when he is out of the way, and enjoin the strictest

secrecy. It is barely possible she did not understand I was about to do so when he interrupted me."

But the current of madame's thought was speedily changed. On returning to the drawing-room and opening the letters, she found that business of vital importance to her monied interests would necessitate her leaving home for a distant town in the course of the next forty-eight hours.

"I can't possibly get off to-morrow," she decided, after a minute's anxious reflection. "So it must be left till the day after."

Meantime, Maurice Arnot stood on the cottage porch wishing a good-night to Louise Deville, who still made a show of sparkling spirits.

"You are perfectly brilliant to-night," he murmured, gazing half-tenderly, half-reverently at the face which was, indeed, exquisitely beautiful under the soft moonlight. Then, with a sudden, passionate impulse, he caught her hand, exclaiming, "Love me, Louise! love me! and so transform this hard world into a paradise! I have sometimes dared to hope you could and would. Will you, Louise?—My beautiful Louise!"

With a proud gesture, Louise withdrew her hand and stepped back, replying in haughtily emphatic tones to his concluding words.

"You have! Then learn that you are vastly mistaken! I never will! We must be friends though, Monsieur Arnot. A flirtation so pleasant should not end in open rupture. Shall we be friends, M. Arnot?"

She extended a little, ice-cold hand. He barely touched it, replying frigidly, as he lifted his hat, "Just as you please, Mademoiselle. Good night."

The next minute he was striding across madame's grand hall. At the foot of the stairs madame's voice arrested him.

"Maurice, come here. I wish to see you before you retire," she quavered from the drawing-room door.

He turned quickly, anxiously enquiring as he hastened towards her, "Are you ill, ma tante?"

"No, no," she returned, more naturally, "not ill, but troubled." And too much absorbed in her own cares to observe his pale face, she continued, "I have bad news here from Mr. Martin, very bad."

And as they seated themselves, she gave him the letter, still open in her hand.

"It is bad enough, indeed," he presently remarked, as he thoughtfully re-folded the sheet. "You will go to-morrow, of course?"

"It is impossible. Jules comes to-morrow about that——"

"Pardon me, Aunt Laroche. Never mind Jules. I will attend to your interests here. It is true Mr. Martin says the day after to-morrow will do; but it is quite evident that he is anxious for your immediate presence. Go then, without delay."

So madame started on her journey, utterly forgetful, in her overwhelming anxiety for the thousands at stake, that the intended note to Louise Deville remained unpenned.

Nor did her mind revert to it till the weight of anxiety oppressing her had been relieved by an interview with Martin. Under the rebound lesser cares presented themselves.

"It is really quite unnecessary to write," she thought; "but I will nevertheless do so to-day, and thus make all safe beyond the shadow of a doubt. I can't possibly leave here in less than a week, and it would be awkward for me if she should happen to tax Maurice with this engagement of my fanciful creation."

Accordingly the note was written; and also a lengthy epistle to her nephew, detailing minutely the important points of the business claiming her attention. They were sealed and posted in time for the night mail, and duly received the following morning.

Maurice, seated before the library table, opened his with eager interest. But he was soon intensely mystified.

"I know, my dear," commenced madame, "that you are to be trusted, else I would not have committed what I did to your keeping. So you must not construe this into an expression of doubt on my part. The truth is, I have been a little fearful that you failed to gather from my last hasty words, that I was about to place a seal upon your lips in regard to the subject which had just engaged us. I therefore concluded to write and impress it upon you, that the conversation was strictly confidential, and on no account to be repeated till the matter becomes public."

"The deuce!" muttered Maurice Arnot, "does my good aunt Laroche think I have taken leave of my senses? The idea that I would bruit her business abroad! Trouble must have turned her brain," he thought again, as he went on reading.

"And now let me assure you, my dear," continued madame, "that I consider you the very soul of honour, and know that I have only to express my wish to have it most carefully observed. The secret which I confided to you about my nephew is known only to a few inti——"

"Her nephew! The secret!" exclaimed Maurice, in angry surprise. "To whom can she be writing?" And he hastily turned to another page. "Mademoiselle Louise Deville! By all——"

The sentence remained unfinished. Starting from his chair with a force that sent it whirling to the floor, he dashed out of the house and across the street to the cottage.

"Mademoiselle Louise is down in the summer-house, sir," replied the servant to his impetuous inquiry, and Maurice strode through the hall to the indicated spot.

"I have a letter here, Mademoiselle Deville, which needs some explanation," he exclaimed, throwing himself into a seat opposite the one from which Louise had nervously started. "It is from my aunt, and though directed to me, was meant for you, I found, after possessing myself of a portion of its mystifying contents. Will you be good enough to enlighten me as to its meaning?"

"Perhaps," smiled Louise from the seat she had resumed, "this may prove a key," handing him a letter addressed to her. "I am quite unacquainted with its contents, for on reading 'My dear nephew,' I turned at once to the signature, which proved to be Madame Laroche's."

Maurice took the letter; and continued sternly,

"What secret has my Aunt Laroche confided to you? It is my right to ask, and my right to be answered, since it appears from this precious epistle that it concerns me above all others."

A crimson flush dyed Louise's pale face as she said gravely, "You should certainly be able to conjecture, Mr. Arnot, what madame would be likely to confide as a secret."

"I certainly am not," he returned, controlling his angry excitement with an effort. "But you will do me the greatest kindness if you will explain at once. Again I ask, what is the secret?"

Louise, paling and flushing alternately, at last answered somewhat falteringly, "I have only heard the story of your engagement, Mr. Arnot."

"What?" he asked, in amazement. "I don't understand."

"Marie—the lady to whom you are engaged," she replied, still more falteringly.

"Marie! when did you hear all this?" he asked, calmly and gravely.

"The evening that I spent with madame," answered Louise again, looking much like a prisoner at the bar.

He gazed silently at her downcast face a moment, and then wheeled around and stood in the doorway of the summer-house for what seemed an age to Louise. Presently he came back to her.

"And you believed her, Louise?" he said, reproachfully. "You believed her after all my silent worship of yourself? Louise, no one could have made me doubt you!"

"Could I doubt your own aunt?" murmured Louise.

"But you could doubt me! Now listen, Louise. Marie is a creature of my aunt's imagination—all that she has told you is a fiction. I love you, and you only. Will you be my wife, Louise?"

Louise's answer must have been favourable, for madame received by the next post a letter from Maurice which contained the following:

"Your letters were duly received by Louise and me, and the necessary exchange made. Believe me, my dear Aunt, we both thank you warmly for so promptly undoing what was so unwisely done. Louise and I are very happy and ask your blessing upon our engagement."

The sheet dropped from Madame's hands.

"Letters exchanged! what have I done? what have I done?" she exclaimed, in utter astonishment and shame.

But she took good care never to ask either Maurice or Louise, and deciding to make the best of a disagreeable event, she called on Louise the next week with a bland innocence truly edifying to the lovers.

FIVE THOUSAND A YEAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

I.

ON a comfortable sofa by the side of a large fire in a spacious London drawing-room, lay a lady, young and handsome. Not, however, in the extreme of youth, or in girlhood, for she had been a wife and mother some years, and was getting towards eight or nine and twenty. Her face was deathly to look upon. Not a shade of colouring appeared in its features, even in the lips; and the eyes were not like eyes, but like two lumps of lead set in there. She had recently passed through a perilous illness, and though so far recovered as to be in the drawing-room, it could not be said she was out of danger. Excessive debility, continued inward fever, and a cough that could not be got rid of, struggled with each other now, and kept her down. She was lying with her eyes closed, awake, but in a sort of unresisted stupor: she mostly lay so all day long, and had done so for the last ten weeks. One, drawing near, could have heard her laboured breathing, rendering her sentences, when she did speak, abrupt and broken. It was Margaret, the wife of Adam Grainger.

The room door opened, and a lad of six came in; too boisterously—but how impart thoughtfulness to young children? He had his mother's handsome features, her expressive dark eyes, and her naturally fine colour. She slowly opened her eyes.

"I want to say good-bye to you, mamma. Sophy was going to take me without, but I ran away from her."

"And have woke up your ma, like an obstinate boy as you are!" broke in Sophy, "I wonder, ma'am, you don't forbid his coming in, unless you please to ring for him."

"I thought you were already at school, Algernon," she panted. "Is it not late?"

"Half-past two," said Sophy.

It was on the stroke of three, but the servants had sat gossiping over their dinner, and Sophy did not hurry herself to move. She thought her mistress, lying there, would not know whether it was late or early. The child drew near to kiss her.

"Algernon, darling, be a good boy. Sophy, did you ask Mrs. Smith this morning how she was?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't think of it. She looked as usual." Mrs. Smith was Algernon's governess. She kept a day school hard by. She was not strong, often complained of feeling ill, and Mrs. Grainger had got into the habit of asking Sophy how she was.

They left the room, and Mrs. Grainger relapsed into stillness. But

thought came across her, troubling her mind, as it often did ; though it made no outward sign.

Should she live ? Or would this illness be her consignment to the grave ? She could not bear to think of it : though her great weakness caused her to feel all anxiety, even this, less poignantly than would one in health. She could not bear to think of leaving her children ; she could not bear to think that another might ever usurp her place with her husband ; be *his* wife, and their second mother. And yet—unless she speedily got better —

The room door opened again, and the same child entered. Sophy also.

"Mrs. Smith's very poorly, ma'am. Her head is that bad she feels it impossible to keep school this afternoon, so she has sent them all back again."

"How tiresome !" feebly uttered Mrs. Grainger.

"She desired her respects to you, ma'am, and she hoped you would excuse it for once, but that indeed she was too ill to bear their noise."

"Well, well ; children *are* troublesome when one is ill. Take him into the nursery, Sophy, and help nurse to amuse them. Algie, dear child, I am not well enough to have you here."

The boy bounded off, full of life and spirits, intending to play with, or tease, his sister Isabel : and what with thinking, dozing, and restlessly turning, the invalid got through another hour or two. The servants came in now and then, to see to the fire, or to urge refreshment on their mistress, and the next interruption was from Mr. Grainger.

He was as remarkably good-looking as of yore, full of spirits as his little son, and he came in with a merry smile on his face, and a cheering word. No words but cheering ones were ever heard from him. He edged himself on to the sofa, and leaning over his wife, kissed her repeatedly.

"Adam," she sighed, "I feel so low this afternoon ! I know I shall never get better."

"You foolish girl ! You are a mile and a half better than you were a week ago. And I have brought some news for you."

"Yes ?" she languidly answered.

"It's this. I called on Dr. Rice as I came home, and he assured me you were progressing towards recovery as fast as one, so ill as you have been, can progress. And he has engaged us to go there to dinner this day month, for he knows you will be ready for it."

"How stupid he is !"

"You will not say so when you find him right. You have not had the baby in worrying you?—or Algernon ?"

"No ; not any of them."

"That's right ! Did cook get you the oysters and do them nicely ?"

"She got them, but it was of no use. I cannot eat."

"But you must eat, Margaret," he answered, in a more serious tone. "It is no good going on, day after day, saying you cannot eat; you must eat."

She made no reply. Only sighed and took possession of his hand, lying with it pressed close to her, her eyes closed. He gazed at her in silence; and, now that she was not looking, the hopeful expression faded from his own face. He *knew* she was in a precarious state.

"Little has got into a splendid thing," he said, presently.

"Has he?"

"Some mines in Cornwall. He and some more fellows are going to work them. I expect, when the thing's regularly afoot, Little will be netting his thousands a year. It is astonishing to hear his account of the wealth opening to them. I have half a mind to drop my spare cash into it."

"Nonsense, Adam!"

"Of course I must hear more about it first, and be all sure. I am going out after dinner to meet Little, and look at his plans and papers. But I shall be back by eight o'clock, Margaret."

Mr. Grainger's getting back at eight, proved to be ten. His head was in a whirl with the grand projects for making wealth, just unfolded to him. They went out of it, however, when he found his wife still in the drawing-room; and he inquired, almost in anger, how she could be so imprudent.

"I waited for you," she said, scarcely able, now, to speak from exhaustion. "And I have too much bed. Up from it late, and going to it early! It makes me weaker. I know it does. To-morrow I shall get up to breakfast."

"Margaret! how can you speak so foolishly?"

"I shall. I shall get up and try it."

"Very well," he cheerfully said. He would not contest the point then, for she was in no state for it.

And the following morning she did get up. Not to breakfast, but directly after it. By ten o'clock she was in the drawing-room. Standing for a moment at the window, and looking out on the gay London street, she saw Sophy cross the road with Algernon in her hand, towards the house of the schoolmistress. It was partly within view, down a side street, at right angles with their own.

"Sad management!" she exclaimed, turning to her sofa. "Ten o'clock, and the child not taken! It is a sign I am away from everything."

She lay down: and presently, to her surprise, she heard the voice of Algernon on the stairs, talking to one of the servants. Sophy came in alone. "What have you brought him back for?" her mistress said, almost sharply.

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Smith is dead."

Mrs. Grainger rose up and looked at her, really doubting her ears.
"What do you say, Sophy?"

"Mrs. Smith is dead."

"Dead!"

"Dead, ma'am. She died in the night. Her husband says it was decline, and she knew she should not get well, but she bore up to the last to keep the scholars together. I expect they had nothing else to live upon, for he gets no teaching at his foreign languages. He is cut up above a bit, poor man, and says he did not know it was so very near. She was only thirty-one: and he don't look so old."

Mrs. Grainger motioned the gossiping servant to leave the room, and lay back on her sofa. Sharp thought came over her with its adder stings. Dead! And she had murmured in her heart at the child's being returned on their hands for *one* afternoon, fearful of his noise disturbing her, when this poor lady had struggled out her life in its midst!

II.

THE weeks rolled by, and Mrs. Grainger was recovering. Not quite so speedily as her physician had hopefully prophesied, but on the whole very well. A shade of pink was returning to her cheeks; she only lay down now and then; and, the greatest sign of all, her naturally vigorous mind was resuming its tone. As to her husband, his whole thoughts and heart were concentrated upon one point—the Great Trebeddon Mines.

One day, a little later than his usual hour for returning, he came bustling in, tearing up the stairs four at a time. His wife was in the drawing-room, one of her little children on her knee.

"How are you, Margaret? All right, I see. What have you got for dinner?"

"For dinner!"

"Because I have asked Little. He'll be here in a minute or two."

"To-day! I wish I had known. There's no time now to make any addition."

"Oh, Little's not particular. He will take pot-luck. I told him so. Really, Margaret, the vista opening to that man is truly astonishing."

"He is lucky."

"I am so glad you are well enough to be down with us in the dining-room; you will be so interested in what he says. Everybody must be. I declare I would rather have that man's prospects than be heir to the first dukedom in the three kingdoms."

Mrs. Grainger laughed.

"Indeed—there's his knock! Pack off that child, Margaret. Stay! I'll ring the nursery bell."

George Little was a man of forty; but in spite of his having attained

to that sober age, he was in no settled condition of life. The fact was, Mr. Little's was a nature too enthusiastic for common business. He had tried his hand at many things; schemes chiefly; and could not be said to have succeeded in any. Either he had grown tired of them, or they of him. A fine fortune of his own had long been dissipated, and he had always some new project on hand, by which it was going to be redeemed. He was good-hearted, good-natured, and good-tempered; a little, quick man of rapid, eager speech, with a keen dark eye set deep in his head, and plenty of intellect above it. Just now he was wild—*wild*—about these mining schemes he had entered on.

"Such a thing, ma'am!" he protested to Mrs. Grainger, when he was fairly launched on his subject after dinner, and his earnest look and tone proved *his* perfect faith in what he asserted, "such a piece of luck that is not met with once in a century! You have heard of Trebeddon?"

Mrs. Grainger had heard the place mentioned by her husband. She believed it was somewhere in Cornwall.

"In Cornwall it is, ma'am. Colonel Hartlebury bought it three years ago for an old song, neither buyer nor seller suspecting the mines of wealth hidden underneath. It is only recently the discovery has been made. There's a princely fortune, ma'am, for a dozen people and for their families after them, down to, I don't know how many generations, for one cannot calculate it."

"The mines are copper, I believe?"

"Copper and tin, Margaret," broke in Mr. Grainger, in an equally eager tone with his guest. "On the neighbouring estate of Trewater there has been—how much realised to the shareholders since it has been worked, Little?"

"The last year they netted about four thousand apiece. Something out of that was kept back for expenses, I forget what. You see, about a dozen only have got it in their own hands."

"But is there no risk?" inquired Mrs. Grainger.

"Not the slightest, if the thing is worked properly," answered Mr. Little. "It is as safe as the bank. In the last number of the *Mining Journal* there's an account of certain mines which have already yielded a profit of £2,000,000 sterling to the company working them."

"Two million pounds sterling!" repeated Mr. Grainger, in admiration. "In Cornwall?"

"In Cornwall," assented Mr. Little. "And these very identical mines had been abandoned by the first workers of them! They went at it the wrong way, you perceive, ma'am; reaped only disappointment; lost their money, grew tired, and forsook them. Another body of men, cautious, wealthy, and experienced, stepped in, and have found their reward. Two millions sterling have that lucky company already netted from what were looked upon as ruined mines."

"They must be a profitable source of wealth when they are judiciously managed," remarked Mrs. Grainger.

"Ma'am! the profits are too vast to be estimated. One's mind gets lost in the contemplation. My embarkation in these mines I look upon as the one fortunate step in my life."

Mr. Grainger was beginning to think it might be the one fortunate step of his. He had been bitten with the mania of speculation, and the disorder was taking rapid hold of him. He had said to his wife that he felt induced to embark his spare cash in the Great Trebeddon scheme, and he forthwith hastened to do so. It was not much: and well had it been for Mr. Grainger had he embarked nothing more. But he lent his name, he lent his energies, and he lent his mind.

He held his lucrative appointment in one of our first-class insurance offices, which his father had held before him. His salary was already £1,000 per annum, and it was a progressing one. Surely enough to satisfy the moderate wishes of a reasonable man!

Still, a few more weeks went by. One evening, upon coming in, Mr. Grainger found his wife had only then entered, for he met the carriage driving from the door. He began to scold.

"Margaret, this is too late for you to be out. Recollect you are not strong yet."

"It is late for me, Adam, I know, but I was well wrapped up, and the carriage was closed. The truth is, I have been shopping. I wanted a dress for the christening."

"What christening!"

"Baby's. He is five months old: quite time he was christened."

"Isn't it done?"

"Done! Why, Adam, I think Mr. Little and his mines have put other things out of your head! He was only baptised."

"I knew it was something of the sort. But—about your going shopping. It was very imprudent, Margaret. I would have chosen your dress."

"You!" laughed Mrs. Grainger. "You don't know silk from woollen; stripes from checks."

"Don't I! Only try me."

"I will. I will try you now. I could not decide in the shop, so they put two or three in the carriage for me to choose from here. There are the parcels, if you will open them."

He did so. And displayed three silk dresses.

"What is that?—a fourth!" exclaimed Mrs. Grainger, detecting another parcel. "Oh, it is that handsome one. I told them not to send that. Sly traders! they thought to tempt me, did they! Is it not beautiful, Adam?"

"Very. Much better than the others. Why don't you fix upon it?"

"Because it is too dear. I am not justified in giving so much. The fact is, Adam, I do not much want a new dress, for I have plenty of good ones, only I thought I should like to wear something new at little Walter's christening."

"You would like this dress, I see, Margaret. I will give it you."

Margaret laughed. "That will be something like robbing Peter to pay Paul. Whether it comes out of your pocket or mine, Adam, I suspect it is much the same. It is too costly."

"My dear, you need not hesitate at the cost of a gown. It is an insignificant item, taken in connection with the income that will soon be ours. In a little while if you choose to spend ten times as much in dress, you may do so."

"Dear me! It seems as if one could not realise it. Yet we have been quite happy: we seem to have had all our wants fully supplied."

"Here—who's that?" he suddenly called out, hearing some one pass the door—"Sophy? Oh, it's you, Jemima," he added, as the nurse appeared. "Take that into your mistress's room." And he proceeded to put up the rejected silks.

"They will be sent for presently," said Mrs. Grainger. "Adam, is it really true that so great a fortune is opening to us?"

"My dear, my share will not be a farthing less than five thousand a year. I wish I was not hampered with that confounded office, I should be down in Cornwall on the spot, hastening the works on. However, it will not be long before I emancipate myself from it. Would you like a trip into Cornwall, Margaret?"

"When I am stronger."

"It would be the very thing for you, I know, and do the children good. Suppose we go down for three or four months when the weather gets warm! We could get a furnished house, I dare say, in the neighbourhood of Trebeddon."

"And let this for the time?"

"Let this! No; give it up. I don't mind sacrificing some rent. When we return, we shall require a residence of far superior style to this. I saw Little to-day, Margaret, and he says they have begun to sink the whim-shaft."

"Whim-shaft?" she echoed.

"You don't understand, I see. Were you ever down in a mine, Margaret?"

"No," she answered with an amused look.

"You shall go down one, and see its wonders."

"But do ladies venture down such places?"

"Oh, it's nothing, if they have plenty of pluck. How delighted Algie will be to explore it! I shall take him down. The miners, round about, think these works of ours will yield a larger return than any in the

district," added Mr. Grainger, returning to his hobby. "They are putting up smiths' shops, powder and material houses, and I don't know what all."

"It must be running away with a deal of money, Adam!"

"Of course. But only think of the returns!"

The following morning, upon Mr. Grainger's entering the offices of the insurance company, at his customary hour, he was requested to walk into the directors' private room. Two of them were there, the chairman, and Mr. Phelps. They were growing in years now, and had been directors in his father's lifetime.

"Mr. Grainger—take a seat—we have requested you to step in here for the purpose of answering a question or two that we wish to put to you. Do you know anything of this?"

The chairman, as he spoke, opened a printed sheet of paper, and set it before him. Not a second glance at it needed Mr. Grainger. It was the flaming prospectus of the Great Trebeddon Mining Company, which had been issued forth to the public: his own name appearing in it as large as life.

The chairman laid his finger upon the spot. "'Adam Grainger, Esquire:' that must be you."

"It is, sir."

"Did you not know that it is a rule of this office that none of its clerks, superior or inferior, may connect themselves, in any way whatever, with any private or public company?"

"No, I did not," said Mr. Grainger, the colour flashing into his face at being, as he looked upon it, dictated to; he, a man of five thousand a year in prospective!

"That is strange. Your father knew it well. I think it must have escaped your memory."

A dim recollection began to dawn on Adam Grainger that there was some such rule in existence. He had completely forgotten it.

"My being connected with the Trebeddon mines cannot render my services here less efficient," he said.

"That is not the question," interposed Mr. Phelps. "The rule is the rule, and all must abide by it. If you are suffered to transgress it, why may not every one else in our employ do the same?"

Mr. Grainger bit his lip.

"Besides, your being connected with an excitable scheme like this does make your services here less efficient," observed the chairman. "Your thoughts are naturally given to this new business; they are taken from your legitimate duties."

"It is not a *scheme*," fired Mr. Grainger, "it is a tangible, *bonâ fide* undertaking. The mines are second to none in England for richness of ore: they will yield immense returns."

"They don't yield them yet," curtly remarked the speaker, looking at

Adam through his spectacles. "I suspect they are absorbing funds, instead of yielding them."

"Of course they are, sir, at present. Nothing can be done in any business, without an outlay at the first onset."

"May I ask how much of it you have contributed as your share?"

"All I had," was the answer. "About three thousand pounds."

"Ah. Take my advice, Mr. Grainger, let your three thousand pounds go, and say nothing about the loss," said the chairman emphatically. "In after years you may count the loss a gain, if it shall have taught you prudence."

"Ay, ay," nodded Mr. Phelps. "Let it go; let it go."

"Let my three thousand pounds go!" ejaculated Adam Grainger, believing the two grey-haired gentlemen before him must be candidates for Bedlam. "What for?"

"You will never get a shilling returned upon them, and you'll only plunge deeper into the mire."

"Have you heard any ill of the Trebeddon mines?" he scarcely dared to inquire.

"Nothing at all: but we know the nature of these things. We are unacquainted with the 'Great Trebeddon' except from this prospectus, and from the advertisements."

"I thought it could not be," he said, in a relieved tone. "It is the finest prospect, sir, that has appeared for years."

"If it is like other mining prospects, it will be 'fine,'" observed the chairman. "They generally end in the ruin of all connected with them."

"Two ignorant old savages!" was the mental compliment of the listener.

"However—to bring the matter in question to an issue, Mr. Grainger. It resolves itself into this: either you must give up the Great Trebeddon, or you must give up your post with us."

"I have been contemplating the probability of giving up my post here later," he replied.

"It must be one or the other *now*," cried the chairman.

Mr. Phelps rose and laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I regarded your father with no common esteem," he said, "and for his sake—and, it may be, a little for your own—I take an interest in you. *Be persuaded*. Look upon this new scheme with our eyes of experience, and remain with us. You will do so if you know when you are well off."

"I expect in a short time to be clearing my five thousand a year from these mines," said the younger man, in a low tone. "There are not many of us in it, and the returns to be divided will be enormous."

The chairman coughed, not a pleasant cough to Adam, for it sounded full of mocking unbelief. "We shall be sorry to lose your services, Mr. Grainger," he said, suppressing its sound. "Rather than do so, we will

make it better worth your while to stay with us : your salary shall be raised at once to twelve hundred a year. Reflect well before you reject it : a bird in the hand is worth half a dozen in the bush, remember."

"I thank you greatly, gentlemen. But I would not give up the prospects opening to me for twice twelve hundred."

"Take until next Monday to consider," interposed Mr. Phelps. "We do not insist upon your answer to-day."

"If you prefer to receive it then," was the somewhat ungracious reply.

"But it will be the same."

"Understand one thing, Mr. Grainger," said the chairman, in a sharp, decisive tone, for nothing vexed him like obstinacy : "we have gone from our usual course to give you this warning, out of regard to your late father ; any other than you would have received summary dismissal. If, after this, you do give up your situation in this house, you give it up for ever. Under no circumstances will you be permitted to enter it again. I pass you my word of that, as chairman of the board of directors."

"Sir," returned Adam Grainger, "what could induce me to wish to re-enter it? My fortune will be made."

"Very well, sir. Our interview for to-day is over."

"Until Monday next," added Mr. Phelps.

"Margaret!" cried Mr. Grainger, bounding into his wife's presence when he reached home, "it's all done."

He spoke in an unusually joyous tone, and she looked brightly up, expecting, probably, that the first year's five thousand pounds had arrived in a parcel.

"Yes! What is it?"

"Those old governors at the office have saved me the trouble of resigning. They called me in this morning, Gatherby and Phelps, to tell me they were ready to discharge me."

"Is that all?" said Margaret. "I suppose they knew you were getting above the situation—in fortune, I mean—and graciously released you."

"Oh did they, though! They are a couple of slow old tubs, who can't get beyond the jog-trot way of their forefathers. The sort of people you know, Margaret, who would rather jolt from here to York in the waggon than risk the railway. They gave me a lecture upon prudence,—as keen a one as ever I had from my father,—urged me to send the mines to the right-about, and remain with them."

"Indeed!"

"They would raise me to twelve hundred a year, they said, if I would have done with the Trebeddon. And if not —"

"What?" asked Mrs. Grainger.

"There was the alternative of leaving them at once. By Monday next I must do one or the other. They need not ransack their brains as to which it will be."

"So soon!"

"Some old rule they recalled to my recollection, which I declare I had forgotten, that no one employed in the company must put a finger into any other pie. I would not have minded staying on a quarter of a year longer, till the warm weather has come in and the thing is more afloat. But I don't care about it. It is as well as it is. So, in a few days, Margaret, I shall be my own master: a gentleman at large."

"Adam," said Mrs. Grainger, thoughtfully, "do you consider it will be prudent to throw up your situation before you receive returns from the other thing?"

"I cannot retain it, as I have connected myself with the mines. Did you not understand me?"

"You are *sure* of these returns from the mines?"

"The returns are as sure as if I had them at this moment in my hand. They will be speedy, too, Margaret."

Still Mrs. Grainger looked thoughtful. "A thousand a year—twelve hundred you say now, I am sure they are very liberal—is a serious sum to give up without equivalent. Remember, we have four children."

"Without equivalent!" repeated Mr. Grainger, opening his eyes in wonder. "Why, Margaret, you are borrowing ideas from Gatherby and Phelps. The equivalent will come in the shape of four or five times as much."

"Well, you understand business matters better than I do. But I wish you could retain your post until the other returns were assured."

"Don't look so gloomy, Margaret."

"Did I look gloomy? I did not know it. I was only thinking."

"What were you thinking?"

"Adam, let me speak out. I know your nature is so very sanguine that I believe you see things with a brighter hue than most men. I was thinking, if the Trebeddon mines should not turn out as you expect—they *should* fail—where shall we be?"

"Upon my word and honour, Margaret, you pay me a very high compliment! How long have you thought me a simpleton? Do you suppose I cannot see the way before me clearer than that? It is not a bit of use talking to women about business," he continued, chafing considerably. "They can't understand it."

"My dear husband, your interests and mine are the same," she gently said. "If I beg you to be cautious and prudent, it is for your sake as much as mine. Think of the children."

"I do think of them: and of you, too. It is for their future that I am anxious to amass wealth. Were I a single man, with only myself to look to, I might go on in the old humdrum way. Twelve hundred a year would suffice me well."

Adam Grainger no doubt spoke as he thought: that if he had nobody but himself, he would be content with his salary. He was unconscious how thoroughly he was mistaken; he was unconscious that the speculating mania had fastened upon him, and that the power urging him on was *not* the future interest of his family, but the fever of the disorder. There is no cure for it, none, until it has had its course. A pretty sharp cure generally comes then.

III.

THE time went on to autumn; say, rather, to the beginning of winter. No particular change had yet taken place, save perhaps in the manner of Mr. Grainger: anxiety, disappointment, and hope deferred, were rendering his naturally sweet temper an irritable one. The Great Trebeddon Mines could not be said to have failed, and they could not be said to have prospered; they were hovering between the two. One of the unhappy speculators who had purchased a right in them was in the habit of likening them to the horse-leech; since they sucked in all the money that could be raised, and were continually asking for more. Give, give! give, give! it was their incessant cry: but they seemed determined to render nothing in return. Adam had been down to the mines. The first time he remained a fortnight, and had come up enraptured: the second time he remained three weeks, and had come up more enraptured still; the third and last time, he had returned not quite so much so. Mr. and Mrs. Grainger were still in their house: not having yet removed to a superior one.

"Adam," his wife said to him about this time, her face wearing a look of anxious uneasiness, "I really must have some money to go on with. Do you know that the tradespeople are beginning to refuse further trust?"

"Which of the tradespeople?"

"None of them are so attentive as they formerly were; so anxious to send for orders. But the butcher is growing troublesome."

"An ungrateful dog!" exclaimed Mr. Grainger. "Seven years, and more, have we been good customers to him, and paid him weekly. What does the man mean?"

"Adam, don't be cross; that will not mend matters: we must put ourselves in their places before we blame them. It is more than six months—eight nearly—since they have received any money, and they know you are no longer in the insurance-office. I wonder they have given us credit so long as this. I have been wishing—if you have no objection—to discharge two of the servants. We can do very well with the others."

"Margaret, you will drive me wild! What in the world is the good of taking a gloomy view of things? To talk in this way, is to dispirit one for everything. It cannot be long, now, before we have returns:

the ore is in the mines, and must be made to realise. We shall soon have money."

"So we have thought for the past six months," she ventured to say, "and it does not come. By discharging two of the servants, we should lessen expenses so far. It will be better to do it."

"Yes! and to stop our credit at once by letting it be known in the neighbourhood that we are compelled to curtail our establishment! You cannot see an inch beyond your nose, Margaret!"

Mrs. Grainger thought she could see much farther, but did not contest the point. "They are asking for their wages," she said.

"They must wait," was his authoritative answer.

"And there is something else being asked for. Though really, Adam, I cannot bear to speak of these things, you take me up so sharply."

"Not you, Margaret," he said, in a softer tone; "but these stupid people vex me with their folly. What is it that is being asked for?"

"The rent," she said, in a low tone.

"The rent! What, old Barker?"

"He called when you were gone to the City yesterday. He said he was sorry to be pressing, but he feared you had got into a mess that you would not readily get out of, and of course he must look to his own interest. He spoke civilly."

"Civilly you call it?" foamed Mr. Grainger. "What did he say—that I had got into a mess?"

"Mess or mesh; I did not rightly hear, and did not ask him. I don't think he will wait much longer, Adam. Three quarters are owing now."

"The insolent old miser! Afraid of three quarters' of a year's rent!—from *me*! He must have taken leave of his senses."

"Adam, I do not think you see things quite in their right light. If we were as we used to be, people would not mind waiting years for their money: wait, and never ask for it. But it is the fact of your not doing anything just now, of your not being in a way of making money, that alarms them. If —"

"I won't talk with you any longer, Margaret," impatiently interrupted Mr. Grainger; "you are as senseless as they are. Not in any way of making money, when you know that the mining operations are going on, and that thousands must be on their road to us! I am astonished at your want of foresight, Margaret."

He went out of the room as he spoke, encountering one of the servants outside. "Mr. Little has called, sir," she said. "He is in the dining-room."

"Little! Oh, that's right: the very man I should like to see. So you have returned?" he exclaimed, shaking hands with his guest.

"Came up last night."

"And how go on things in Cornwall?"

"Well—slower than we should like to see them," hesitated Mr. Little. "The fact is, there has been more trouble getting these mines in working order than any of us anticipated. Things looked so promising at first."

"Do you mean to say they don't look promising now?" wrathfully demanded Mr. Grainger. He had been the sweetest-tempered man in the world, but these disappointments fretted him.

"They are as promising as ever," replied Little. "But the difficulty is to realize the promises. We are at a standstill for want of money."

"Not a complete standstill?"

"I am sorry to say we are."

"Child must advance it."

"Child won't. I have just been to him, and he flew in a regular passion. Says he washes his hands of the lot, and wished the mines had been in a certain hot place before he had ever heard of them. But I caught a whisper, down at Trebeddon, that Child had been burning his fingers with some other speculation, and had not the money to advance. I firmly believe it is so."

"Colonel Hartlebury?"

"He is cleaned out. Down to his half-pay."

Adam sat and drummed on the table. "How much is wanted now?" he asked.

"About two thousand pounds, we compute —"

"Why it was two thousand pounds three months ago, and you have had double that since!" came the interruption.

"It was that influx of water that played the deuce with us. But we now believe, and with reason, that two thousand would bring the ore into the market. Of course, every step has advanced us nearer to it."

"What is to be done?"

"Can you give us a little more help, Grainger?"

"You may as well ask this table for help as me. Those bills you got me to sign and raise money upon, will soon be due, and I don't possess a brass farthing towards meeting them. It is a good thing Mrs Grainger knows nothing about the bills: they would worry her mind night and day."

"We are all in the same predicament," cried Little.

"No you are not," was the quick response of Mr. Grainger. "You have none of you put bills out."

"If we don't get the ore into the market speedily, it will play Old Gooseberry with us all."

"We *must* get it in, Little."

"I know we must. But I don't see how it's to be done, unless money can be found. There's not five hundred pounds among us, that's available."

"Have you seen Green?"

"No. I am going to call upon him when I go back to the City. He can do nothing."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Grainger. "We must stir heaven and earth about this. It would be desperation for it to fail now."

"And a debtor's gaol and the Bankruptcy Court, after it," spluttered Little.

Adam Grainger's face flushed hot, and he passed his handkerchief over it. The face grew hotter and hotter.

"Better set on and hang ourselves than stand that," added Little, as they went out.

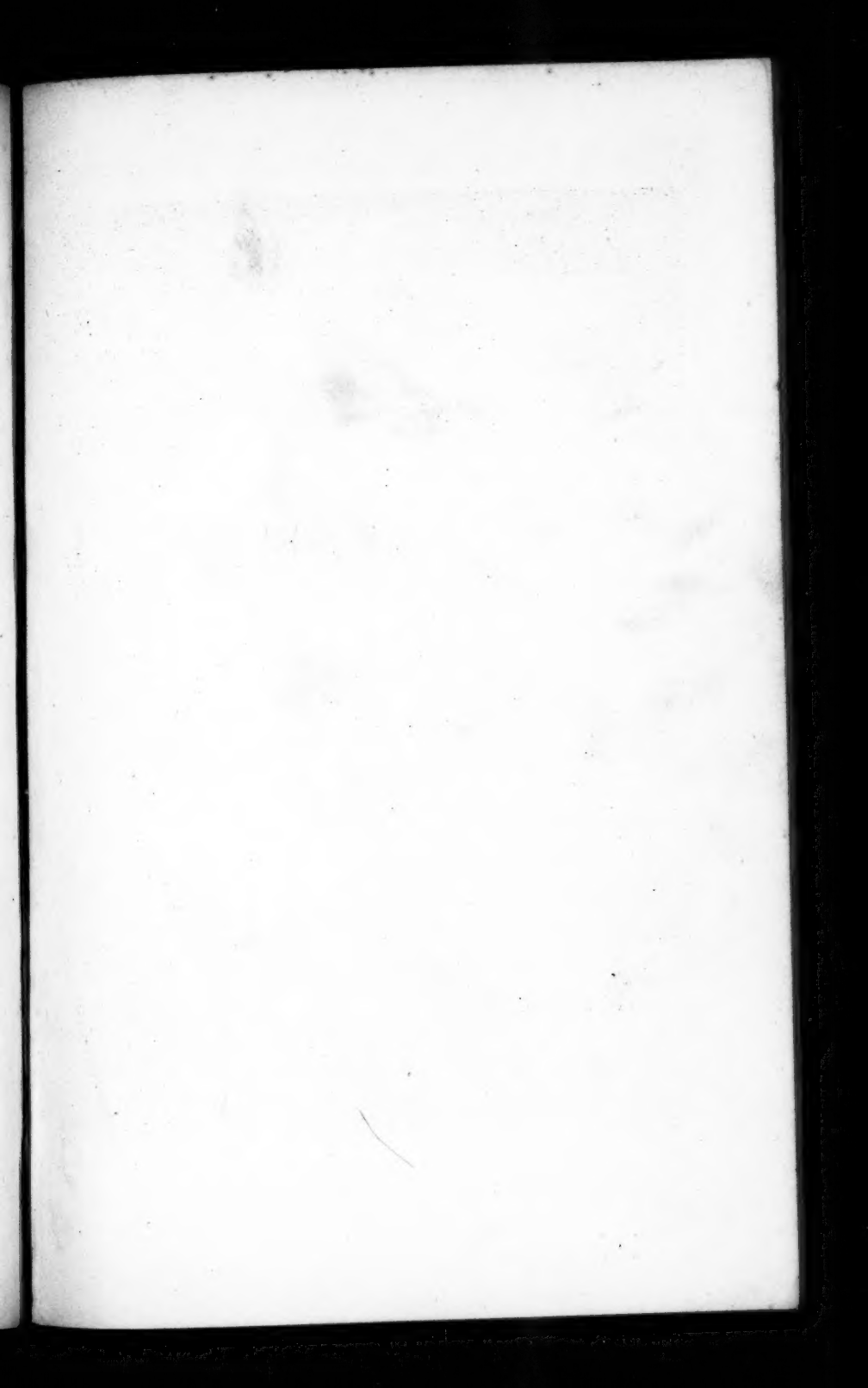
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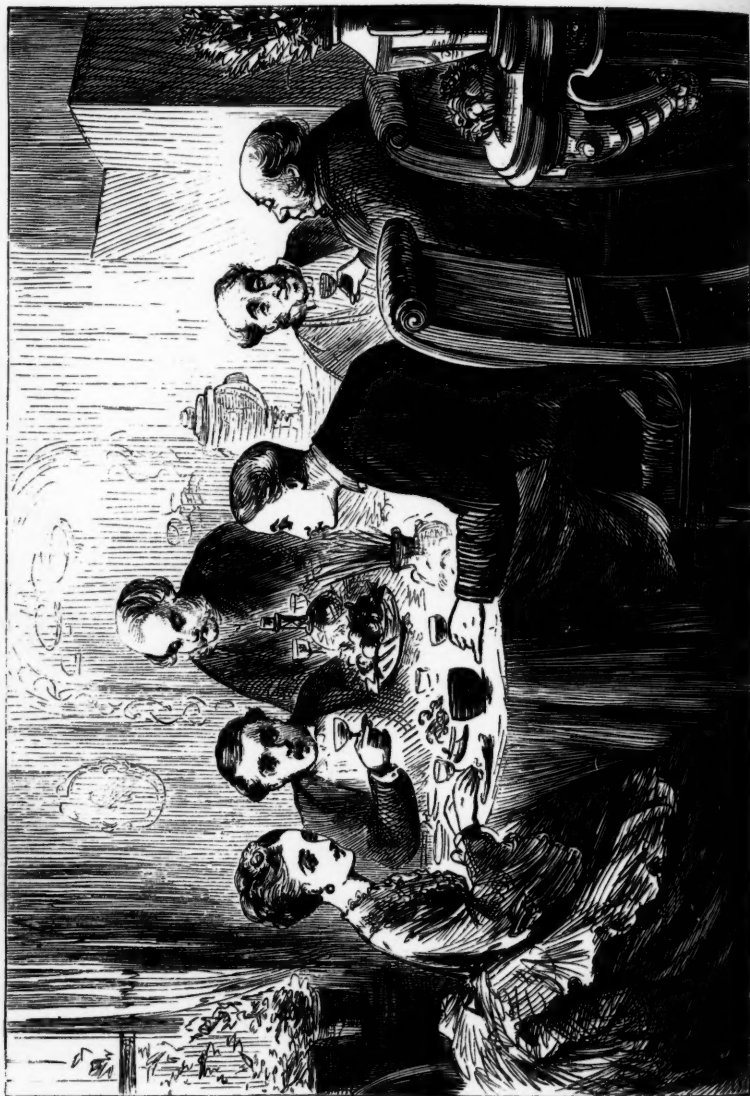
You remember those two remarkable plates in the book of "Martin Chuzzlewit?" The wondrous city of Eden as it appeared in print, and the wondrous city of Eden as it proved in reality. You remember Martin's rapture, his uplifted hands and eyes when reverently contemplating the public buildings in the picture; his indignation at Mark Tapley's somewhat suspicious remark, "Perhaps they grewed spontaneous?" Just what that flourishing city of Eden, in print, was to the enraptured mind of Martin Chuzzlewit, had the great Trebeddon mining scheme been to Adam Grainger; and just what the city proved to be when the two expectant travellers reached it—a feverish swamp, a wild ruin—had the Great Trebeddon Mines faded to now.

But did even this effect the cure, and serve to open the eyes of Mr. Grainger? Not it. Not yet. If he had had ten thousand pounds at his command, he would still have thrown it into the yawning gulf. But he had not the ten thousand. No, nor ten pounds.

Need you be told the sequel? The Great Trebeddon Mines proved a failure. Whether from want of copper and tin, or from want of capital to disembowel them, is of no consequence here; they failed, and ruin overtook many who had connected themselves with them. The most perfect ruin fell upon Adam Grainger. Christmas passed quietly, and then all the ill came rushing on at once. The bills he had accepted became due, and he was sued upon them; the report of the failure of the mines flew about far and wide; the landlord paid him a visit in the peculiar fashion loved by landlords, and all the tradespeople came down upon him together. And soon, worse than all, Mrs. Grainger had to battle out her trials alone, as she best could, for her husband was taken to cool his ardour within the walls of the Queen's Bench prison. He had better have kept to his twelve hundred a year!

But we have not done with him yet.





J. SWAIN.

HARRY FURNIB.